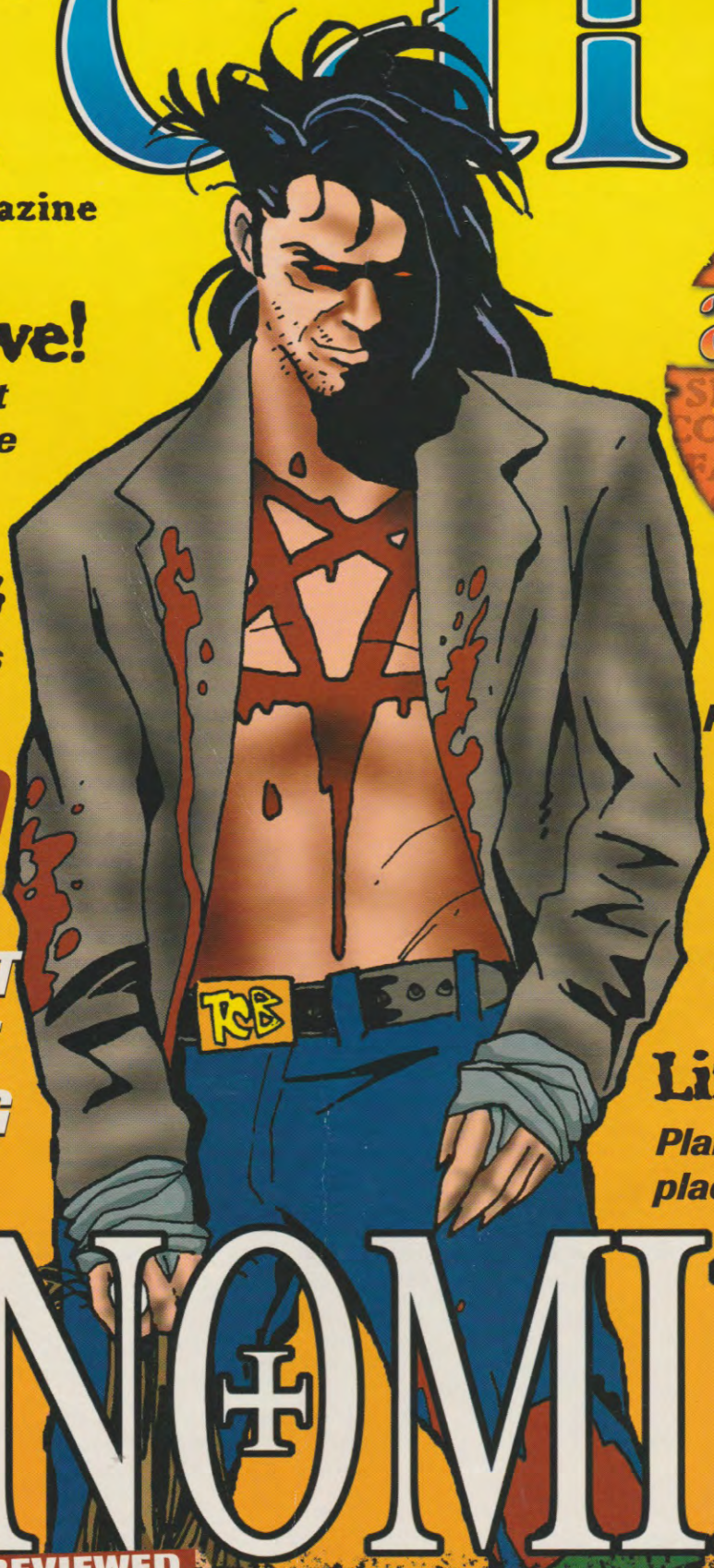
FOR ALL GENRES, ALL GAMES & ALL ROLEPLAYERS

29 New roleplaying & CCG releases reviewed in this issue!

arcane

the roleplaying magazine



REVIEWED!

Cthulhu Live!

Insanely clever, or just insane? Find out inside

CRUCIAL!

Magic Tips

Deck building, Visions combos, and more

DAMNED

OR PRAISED? IT'S JUDGEMENT DAY FOR STEVE JACKSON'S LONG AWAITED...

the roleplaying magazine arcane PRESENTS FREE ENCOUNTERS SPECIAL

Vikings

Pillage ideas for your fantasy campaign

No Fear?

In horror, less can be more – we show you why

Life in Space

Planets aren't the only place to hang your hat

In Nomine

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE Dicemaster • Noir • Compact Trail of Tsathoggua • Dresda • Charnel Houses of Europe • Warehouse 23 • Pirates & Privateers • Starblade Battalion • And more...

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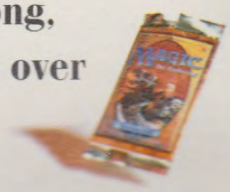

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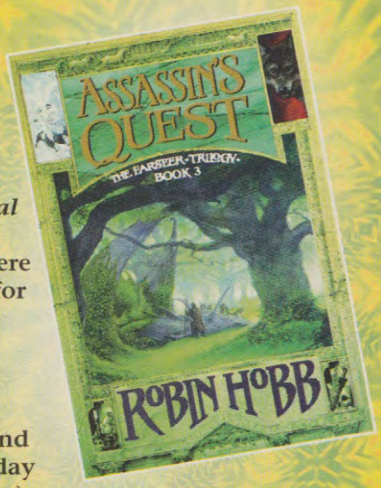
This month's news

Voyager no limits

log on for more information about Voyager on:
http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager

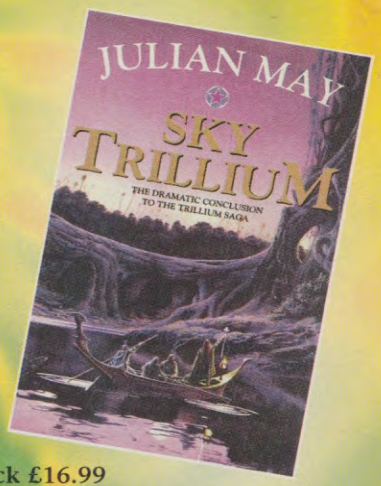
We are delighted to be welcoming Robin Hobb to England for the first time to celebrate the publication of *Assassin's Quest*, the final volume of the Farseer Trilogy. *Assassin's Apprentice* and *Royal Assassin* were the fantasy phenomenon of 1996, and there will be several opportunities for fans to come and meet Robin during her tour.



Dates set so far include Birmingham (Andromeda) on Saturday March 1st, Redhill and Woking (Hammicks) on Monday 3rd March and Cardiff (Dillons) on Wednesday 5th March.

For further details, keep an eye out in your local bookshop, or check the Voyager website

SKY TRILLIUM
Julian May

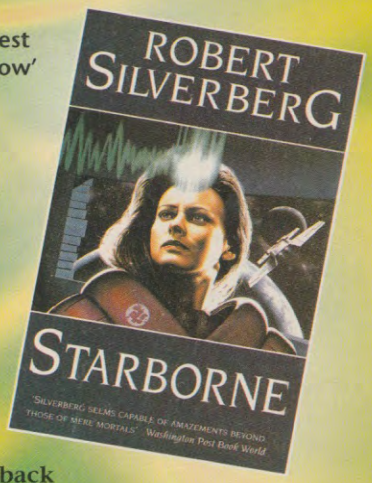


Sky Trillium is the dramatic conclusion to the Trillium saga and is a must for all lovers of quality fantasy. The three royal sisters are working in unison against the forces of evil, but after many long years, Orogastus, the banished dark sorcerer, is stirring. The stage is now set for a confrontation that will decide, once and for all, the fate of their world.

Available 3 February in hardback £16.99

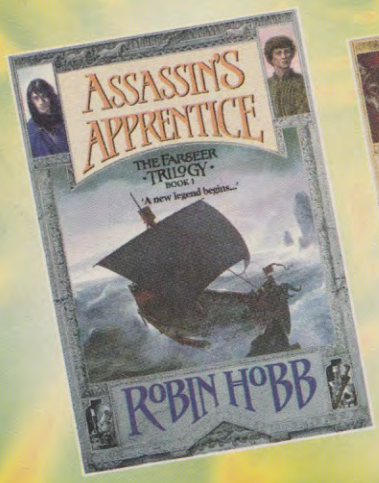
STARBORNE
Robert Silverberg

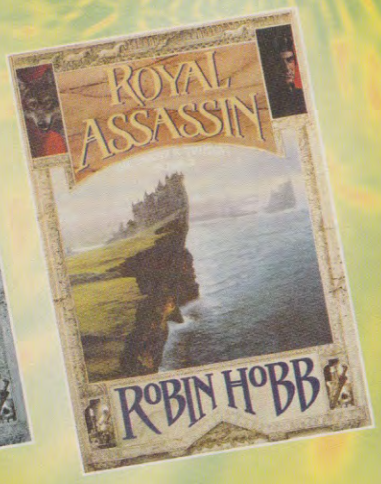
'Where Silverberg goes today, the rest of science fiction will follow tomorrow'
ISAAC ASIMOV


ROBERT SILVERBERG
STARBORNE
"SILVERBERG SEEMS CAPABLE OF AMAZEMENTS BEYOND THOSE OF MERE MORTALS." Washington Post Book World

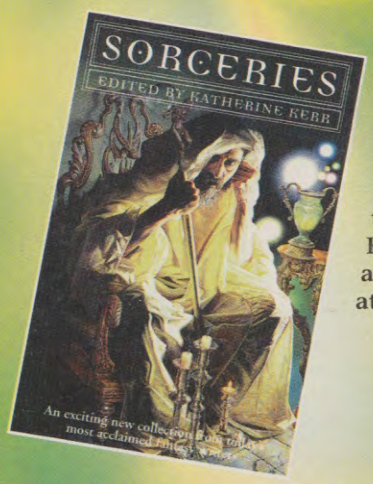
Earth's decadent 23rd century society decides that the unknown depths of space must be explored, in search of a habitable world: a new Eden, where humanity can reinvent itself through the challenge of a virgin planet. With a crew of 50 men and women, the starship Wotan confronts the unknown and discovers a cosmos full of problems.

Available 17 February £5.99 paperback





Also out this month are 2 new X-Files novelisations, *Voltage* (3 February) and *E.B.E.* (3 March), in which the FBI's finest investigate freak electrical storms killing off residents in a small Oklahoma town and scour the country in search of Extraterrestrial Biological Entities. Voyager also brings you another top TV tie-in in the form of *The Unauthorized Trekkers Guide to the Next Generation and Deep Space Nine* — all you ever wanted or needed to know about boldly going where no man has gone before! (Available from 3 February, £5.99).



For all lovers of magic and sorcery comes a stunning new collection of original stories from some of the finest fantasy writers of our time, *Sorceries*, edited by Katherine Kerr. *Sorceries* is available from 17 February, at £5.99.

These and other titles can be ordered by telephone. Access or Visa card holders call: London 0181 307 4052 or Glasgow 0141 306 3349.

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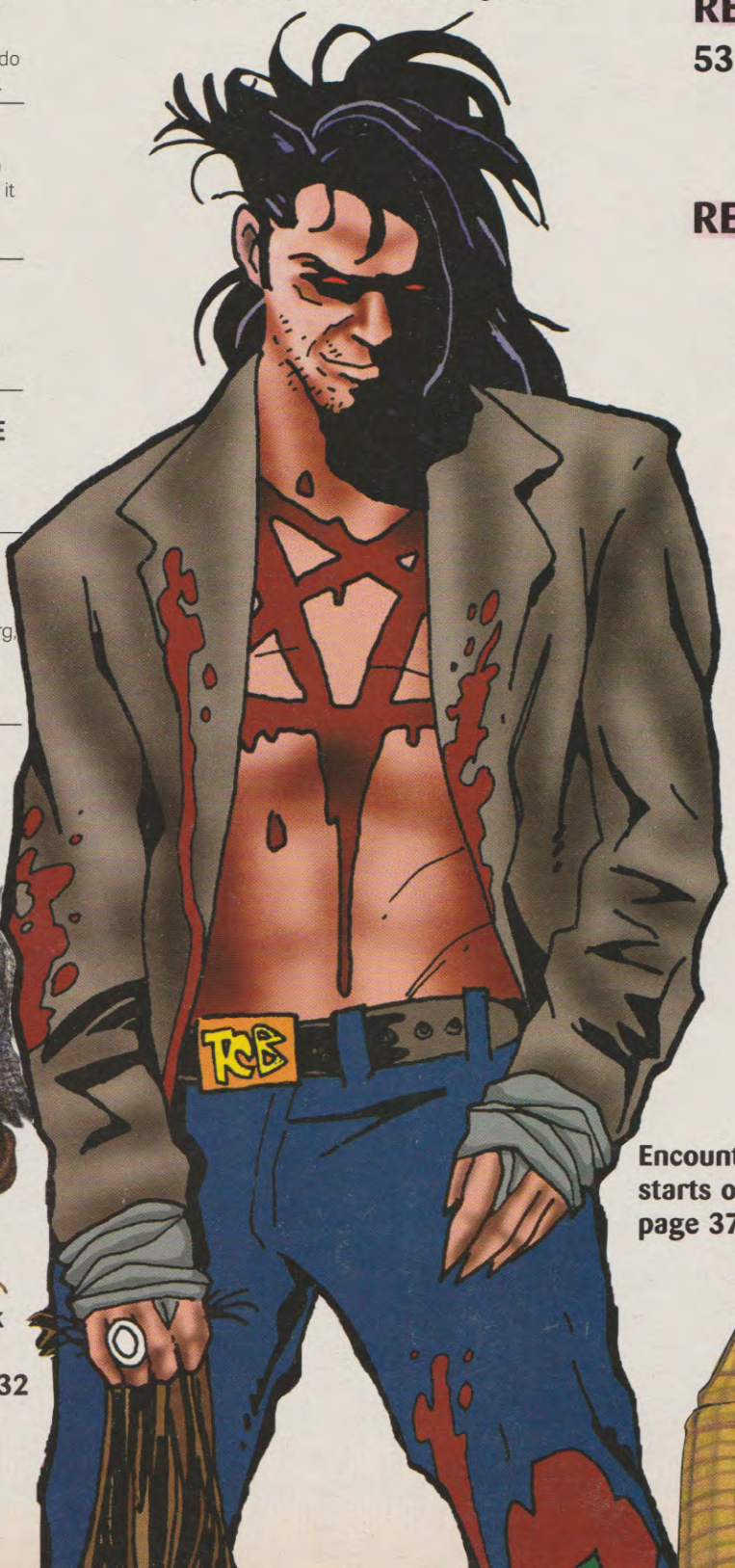

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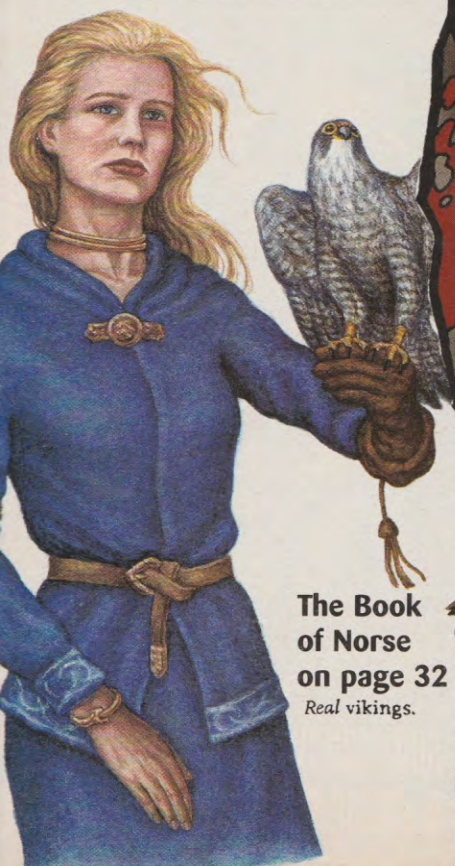

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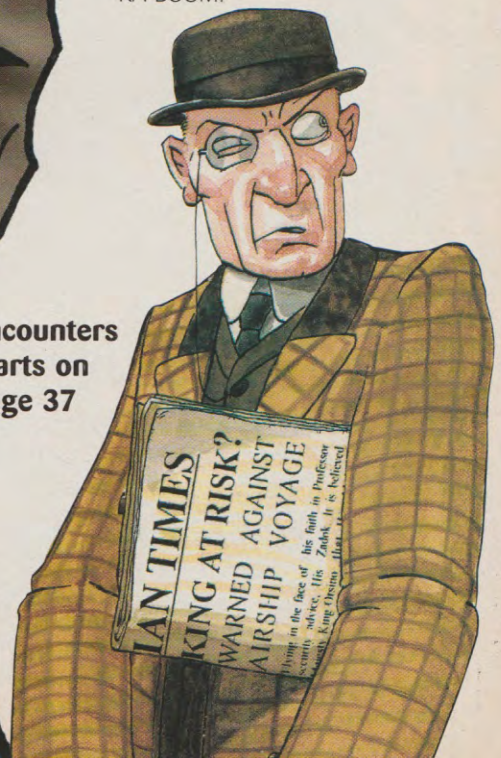

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This issue would have been impossible without... **clementines**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **supplements**

Scary Monsters

There's more to horror than tentacles and goo.

The trouble with monsters is that they never live up to your expectations. This was clearly the case with those '50s B-movies where plastic lobsters were held up close against the camera. But it's also true of modern films such as *Predator*. And it's true of roleplaying games too.

The special effects budget isn't the answer. In a game you've got no constraints, effects-wise. Fancy having Great Chuhlhu rising out of the Thames under Tower Bridge? No problem. A horde of hopping vampires running (hopping?) riot in Kowloon? Sure thing. A monstrous dragon swooping down on a bunch of dwarves? Piece of cake.

You can do these things, but they're not actually very scary. No matter how much the NPCs run around bleating, no matter how many SAN roles your players have to make, monsters are not intrinsically scary. They're just a bunch of adjectives – and it's hard enough even finding the right ones. For instance, in the cold light of day a shoggoth looks like a big pile of sick. Sick's not scary. Unpleasant, yes, but not scary.

"In the cold light of day a shoggoth looks like a big pile of sick. Sick's not scary. Unpleasant, yes, but not scary."

Maybe Lovecraft instinctively knew this. Quite often he draws a veil over what his monsters look like. They're so horrible it's just indescribable. Frankly, this approach won't wash with roleplayers.

'What do I see?'

'It's, er, indescribably horrible.'

Not good. Lovecraft's other solution was a better one. It's this: keep the monsters off stage for as long as possible. Rats in the walls are scarier than rats caught in the glare of a sodium light. Ditto ghouls, ghasts, two-headed dogs, or whatever it is.

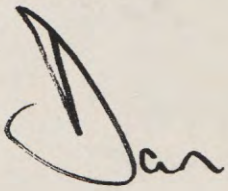
This 'lurking terror' approach is used in plenty of films too; one of the best is still, after 20 years, *Alien*. Sure, Geiger did a good job with the effects. It wouldn't have worked half so well if we'd had a plastic alien held up close to the camera. But the main reason that the film is so full of suspense is that the alien is a hidden danger. It, whatever it is (remember that only one person who sees it lives), is Out There. Somewhere.

The sequel, *Aliens,* overdoses on aliens. It's an action movie, not a horror movie, with aliens exploding like blancmanges all over the place. Fun, okay. Scary? I think not.

You could go one stage further than the lurking terror approach, of course, and get rid of the monsters entirely. Or at least swap them for monsters of a more conventional kind. Like people, or animals. In any game where players expect the unexpected, the ordinary can be a lot more puzzling than the extraordinary ever is.

All of this is particularly relevant to horror games, but it applies to other games too. Pile monsters into a fantasy game and the novelty swiftly palls. Monsters are monsters because they're different. It's the same in sci-fi games. In terms of aliens, less is more.

Anyway, turn to the feature on page 20 and see what you think.



Dan Joyce, Editor

NEWS

News from around the roleplaying industry brought to you by **arcane**.

STAR WARS BOOKS

• West End Games is releasing no less than six new books for its *Star Wars* game – see page 10.

IN NOMINE COMPO

• We've got ten copies to give away and you can win one in our competition on page 12.

Champions: The New Millennium

The oldest surviving superhero roleplaying game returns in a new edition.

COMING SOON

The new edition of the *Champions* roleplaying system from Hero Games, *Champions: The New Millennium,* has been sent to the printers.

The new edition of the classic game has been completely re-written and revised, and will be based around the Fuzion rules system jointly developed by Hero and R Talsorian Games. The system, previously seen in the *Bubblegum Crisis* roleplaying game (**arcane** 14), is completely compatible with the 4th Edition *Champions* rules, but offers greater flexibility and variable levels of complexity to suit different styles.

The system is far from the only change in the new version of the game, though. The old *Champions* world has been all but destroyed by a vast cataclysm, which has claimed the lives of all the powerful heroes who once protected mankind in their effort to save the Earth. With the deaths of the Champions, their old foes – Dr Destroyer, Black Paladin, Mechanon, and Eurostar – are unopposed, and are rising again to threaten the world with their twisted schemes and evil plans. The world of *Champions: The New Millennium* is in desperate need of heroes. And that's where the players will come in.

As well as the Fuzion rules system and extensive notes on the history of the *Champions* world, *Champions: The New Millennium* will feature 16 pages of full-colour comic artwork, details of the various powerful super-villains and some of the New Champions who have arisen to oppose them, as well as a wealth of campaign background and inspiration for adventures and campaigns.

The original *Champions* was the first really successful superhero roleplaying game and one of the most influential rules systems ever, introducing points-based character generation, and many other concepts common in modern games. It's continued to prove popular through four previous editions, and has a dedicated following of superhero gamers. The release of *The New Millennium* may well herald a renaissance for superhero roleplaying and, it has to be said, not before time...

Champions: The New Millennium will be released by Hero Games in April. Look out for a full review of the system in the next issue of **arcane**.

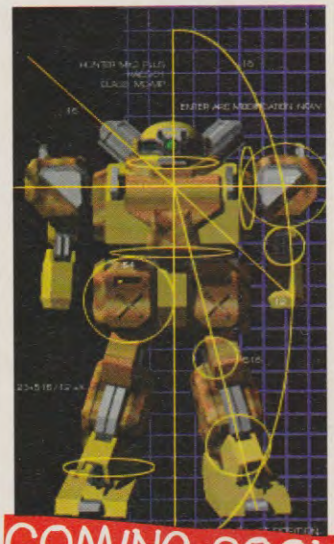
Dream Pod 9

More *Heavy Gear* and a return for the *Jovian Chronicles*.

Dream Pod 9 is certainly planning on keeping itself busy this year. As well as a range of new supplements for its highly successful *Heavy Gear* roleplaying and tactical combat system, the company is also planning to release a brand new game based on its popular *Jovian Chronicles* setting.

Due any day now are the Northern and Southern versions of the *Record Sheets One: Gears and Striders* books for *Heavy Gear.* Each book will include full *Heavy Gear* record sheets for all of the vehicles found in the Northern and Southern editions of the *Vehicles Compendium One,* respectively. The sheets have been designed to speed up play and make it much easier to keep track of vital information during the game, and are aimed at both the roleplaying and tactical combat aspects of the *Heavy Gear* system.

The new *Jovian Chronicles* game, on the other hand, sees Dream Pod 9 return to one of the ideas that helped start the company. Originally released as a supplement for R Talsorian's *Mekton Zeta* system, the *Jovian Chronicles* described the war-torn solar system of 2210. *The Jovian Chronicles,*



COMING SOON

Divine Am

First two releases for *In Nomine* on the way.

With the *In Nomine* rulebook still warm from the printing presses (see our full, four-page review this issue), Steve Jackson Games is already hard at work on the first supplements for the new game system.

First out will be the somewhat obviously titled *In Nomine GM's Screen.* This will be a three-panel cardboard affair, with panoramic artwork from the excellent Dan Smith (who is responsible for the art in many of the *GURPS* supplements and the main *In Nomine* rules), and all the tables an *In Nomine* referee will need during play. The *In Nomine GM's Screen* will come complete with a 32-page adventure book containing various ideas and inspiration for *In Nomine* scenarios of all types.

Following hot on the screen's heels will be *Night Music,* the first sourcebook for *In Nomine.* The book deals with

ears up

Silhouette Edition resurrects this dangerous setting, only this time it's a complete game in itself, based around the same *Silhouette* system that forms the backbone of the *Heavy Gear* line. The new rulebook will contain everything that you need to set up and play games in the *Jovian Chronicles* universe, including a detailed description of the *Jovian Chronicles* setting itself, the *Silhouette* system, and a realistic set of vector-based space combat rules that are designed to be fast, realistic and playable in either two or three dimensions.

As well as the full game, Dream Pod 9 is planning to release a cut-down and simplified version, the *Jovian Chronicles Demo Game*. Based on the success of the *Heavy Gear Demo Game*, this is intended to introduce gamers to the setting, and give them a taste of the full version without having to spend too much money. The set will contain everything you need to play a few games in the *Jovian Chronicles* setting, including eight Exo-Armor counters, a hex map, and simplified version of the space combat rules.

Look out for reviews of all these releases in the next issue of **arcane**.

bition

the Corporeal Realm in the world of *In Nomine*, containing an in-depth look at human characters of all types, fleshing out and expanding the basic rules presented in the main book. As well as more information on Soldiers and Undead, there will be rules for Saints (Heaven's answer to the Undead), and several other character types.

In addition, *Night Music* will feature details of several new Word-bound celestials from both sides of the struggle, expanded information on the Tethers that connect the Corporeal and Celestial Realms, and a complete campaign setting, together with three inter-linked adventures dealing with Fufur, the Demon of Speed Metal who aspires to the position of Demon Prince of Rock & Roll...

The *In Nomine GM's Screen* will be released at the end of March, with *Night Music* to follow in April. Look out for full reviews of both very soon.

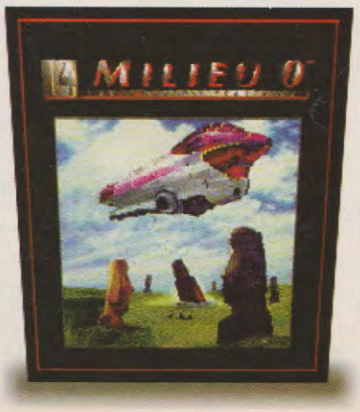
Traveller

gets a background

The standard setting for *Traveller 4th Edition* is finally on its way.

After some delays (and three other sourcebooks), Imperium Games is soon to release the first of the 'Milieu' series of historical background and setting books for *Traveller*.

Milieu 0, and the accompanying *First Survey*, detail the *Traveller* universe at the very start of the Third Imperium, some thousand years before the time of *Classic Traveller*. This is the default setting for *Traveller 4th Edition*, the one for which both the previously released *Starships* and *Central Supply Catalogue* have been designed. *Milieu 0* itself will contain a wealth of background information in its 110 pages. It looks first at the social and historical forces that led to the formation of the Third Imperium, then considers the actual processes by which the mighty empire was developed. In addition there'll be a breakdown of the first wave of expansion, a mass of Library Data concerning every aspect of the period, new rules and suggestions for political campaigns, details of all the major powers, groups and companies of the time, and a wealth of adventure hooks and brief suggestions.



The companion volume, *First Survey*, contains the full starmaps produced by the first Imperial Survey of the Third Imperium. Complete details on any star system of interest, details of local borders and power blocks, and much more will be included.

There'll be full reviews of both books in the next issue of **arcane**, out on Friday 25th April.

More Manga Madness

Manga Video, purveyors of bonkers Japanese animated videos, is about to launch a new label, Mean and Mercenary. The new line will specialise in "hard-hitting action films", both animated and live-action.

The first release under the new label will also be called *Mean and Mercenary*, and is a collection of the best fight scenes from previous and upcoming releases, including *Ghost in the Shell*, *Fist of the North Star*, and *Streetfighter*. This cunning move means that on one tape you get all the best bits from a wide range of films – perfect inspirational material for over-the-top action games, and damn good fun to watch as well.

Future releases will include *Tokyo Fist* – a dark action move from Tsukamoto, the director of *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* – and *Choke*, which features the talents of legendary Brazilian martial artist Hickson Gracie.

And besides...

Gokko

Headlight Publishing is currently hard at work on a new roleplaying system, called *Gokko*.

The game has been inspired by the stunning visuals, fast pace and imaginative plotting of Japanese animated films, and will feature full rules for a wide variety of different character types, as well as a detailed and flexible combat system designed to emulate the kind of flashy moves that are an integral part of the genre.

That's about all we know at the moment, but as soon as more details appear, you can be sure we'll bring them to you. *Gokko* is currently scheduled for a release this summer.

Babylon Project ships

The long-awaited *Babylon Project* roleplaying game, based on the hit TV show *Babylon 5* and developed by Chameleon Eclectic and Wireframe Productions, has been released in the United States.

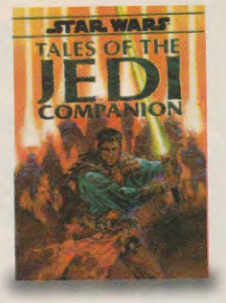
After many delays and setbacks, the game finally left the printers and went into distribution at the start of March. Demand for the game has been high, and both companies are expecting it to do very well.

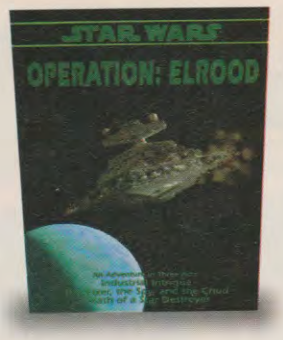
Unfortunately, legal problems with the licensing of the *Babylon 5* show have prevented the game from being distributed in the UK or Europe at the moment. Chameleon and Wireframe are working on overcoming the problem, though. We'll bring you a full review of the game as soon as we can.

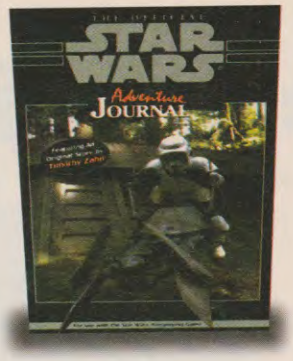
Arggh! Gremlins!

We at **arcane** would like to apologise to both Avalon Hill and Spirit Games. In last issue's news story about Mayfair Games closing down (**arcane** 17), we rather stupidly credited Mayfair with the *James Bond 007* roleplaying game, which is, of course, an Avalon Hill game. Oops.

Likewise, we'd like to apologise to Spirit Games of Burton on Trent, which kindly agreed to the use of its *Magic: The Gathering* price lists, which were used along with several other lists to arrive at the prices given in last issue's free book. Unfortunately, the credit for Spirit Games got lost somewhere along the line, and didn't appear in the finished book. Sorry.







Star Wars Bonanza

Truckloads of new releases from West End Games.

No doubt looking forward to the rocketing popularity of *Star Wars* this year, West End Games seems to be pulling out all the stops with its RPG based on the movies. No fewer than six new books for the game are on their way this month.

The first is the *Tales of the Jedi Companion,* a hardback supplement and sourcebook for the *Tales of the Jedi* and *Freedom Nadd Uprising* comics from Dark Horse. Covering everything about the series, from the main characters to the starships, droids and planets, the book presents game statistics and notes on using all of them in a *Star Wars* game. In addition, the book draws together all the Force Powers ever detailed in any *Star Wars* supplement, and presents detailed notes on running a *Tales of the Jedi* campaign.

Next comes *Instant Adventures,* a collection of short scenarios and minor plots designed to be dropped into any *Star Wars* campaign and run on a moment's notice – just the thing when your players finish something too quickly, so you don't want anything major to happen.

Third on the list is *Operation: Elrood,* a three-part adventure in one book, set in the remote Elrood sector where tensions are mounting and a major corporate war seems set to start at any moment. The players must investigate the sector's complex problems, and find out what's going on before the war starts for real.

Following that comes the *Gamemaster Toolkit* for *Star Wars Live-Action Adventures,* the first supplement for the live-action *Star Wars* rules. The book will be split into four sections – the first offering advice and tips on running *Star Wars Live-Action Adventures,* the second offering a starport as a setting, the third comprising four pre-designed adventures, and the fourth featuring new rules and additions to the system.

Finally comes the latest edition to the *Star Wars Adventure Journal,* and the fourth volume of the *Classic Adventures* series, featuring some of the most popular material from previous editions of the *Star Wars Adventure Journal.*

We'll bring you full reviews in the next issue of **arcane**.

Card-sharp Chaosium

New *Mythos* expansion and *Eternal Champion* CCG planned.

Since the release of the *Dreamlands* expansion for *Mythos* (**arcane** 16), Chaosium has made some changes to its collectable card game plans.

The *Mythos*-based game provisionally titled *Mythos Now* will now be called *Mythos: New Aeon.* The set will feature modern-day cards for the *Mythos* game, and will also help to fill out Europe and some other areas of the *Cthulhu* world – notably New York, Innsmouth and Kingsport. As with *Dreamlands,* the *New Aeon* set will almost certainly be a stand-alone expansion (like *Magic's Ice Age* and *Mirage),* playable both on its own and with existing cards. Another 1920s expansion is also planned, but is unlikely to be released until next year.

Likewise, the *Eternal Champion* CCG, based on the works of eminent fantasy writer Michael Morcock, has been put back until next year as well. Originally Chaosium had hoped to publish the game this autumn, but rather than rush it, the company has decided to shelve the project while it finishes some other releases. Morcock fans shouldn't be disheartened, though, because the game seems fairly certain to make an appearance – just later than planned.

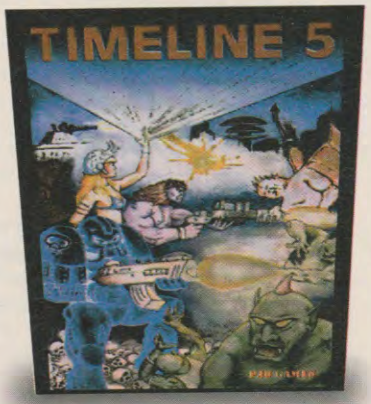
Timeline 5

UK company PJB Games all set to release its first RPG.

New UK gaming company PJB Games has announced that its first roleplaying game, *Timeline 5,* is nearing completion.

The game is set in a futuristic version of Earth that has been torn sunder by two vicious wars against demons from another dimension. These were unwittingly unleashed by a scientific experiment in faster-than-light physics which opened a portal to another dimension.

When the demons arrived, they brought magical energies with them, energies that mankind quickly learned to harness in the desperate battle for survival. The unrelenting assault from the extra-dimensional demons also brought aid from an unexpected quarter – an alliance of alien cultures that had been observing Earth for some time. Throw in a terrible and inexplicable plague that twisted many innocent people into mutants, and the stage is set.



Timeline 5 seems to be an attempt to combine the best elements of most of the popular roleplaying genres – cyberpunk, fantasy, science fiction, alien invasion, and a healthy dash of horror. It's a neat idea, and if it works, it could be well worth looking out for. The game promises a simple task resolution system based on a single 20-sided dice, reams of background information, and a vast array of options for players to choose from, including high-tech weaponry, alien technology, magic and several player character races.

We'll bring you a full review of PJB's *Timeline 5* in the next issue of **arcane**. In the meantime, any interested gamers wanting more information can call PJB Games on 0131 447 5104.

DARK HORIZONS
4th-6th April
Drum Hill, Derby. Science Fiction Live-Action Roleplaying System now in its 6th year of operation. Become a member of the 5th Company of the Colonial Marine corps. The campaign is set some 500 years in the future. Bed, board and equipment provided. Other events planned throughout the year. All events cost £55 per head. Contact **Tony Gill,** Dar Horizons SF LARP, 25 St John's Road, Harrogate, North Yorks HG1 3AF Phone/Fax **01423 568407** e-mail Tony@drkhrzns.demon.co.uk http://www.drkhrzns.demon.co.uk/index.html

MOX A MONTH II
5th April
Standard Type II *Magic* tournament organised by London's Guild of Mêlée and Magic. £1 entrance with a guaranteed £300 worth of prizes, including, of course, a Mox. Contact **Jason on 0181 715 8675** from 25th March.

EMAILE'S POX A MONTH
5th April
Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Glasgow. **Stuart Gosden 0131 467 4540**

CHEESECON
5th-6th April
RGU Student's Union, Schoolhill, Aberdeen AB1 1JQ.
WotC hosted *M:TG* events, LRPs including *Vampire,* RPGs and other tourneys. Special guest – Dave Allsop, creator of *SLA Industries* and *Reverie.* Charity Auction! Contact the above address or phone **Nathan on 01224 584590** e-mail gnl.mi196.student.eee.rgu.ac.uk@eee-student.eee.rgu.ac.uk

SHREWSBURY GAMES CLUB TOURNAMENT
6th April
Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Shrewsbury.
Mark Kennett 01743 361417

THE GATHERING XI
13th April
Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Doncaster.
For more information contact **John Milner 01302 760251** or you can e-mail him at cid@val holme.demon.uk

NOTTINGHAM MAGIC
19th April. Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Nottingham.
Rachel Sisson 0115 938 3918

MAGICAL SEASONS AT KINGSTON: SPRING
20th April. Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Hampton.
Martin Swan 01252 332769

Birmingham Magic
20th April. Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Birmingham.
Simeon Jones 0121 608 6768 simjon@waverider.co.uk

DUNDEE MAGIC
20th April. Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Dundee.
Silas Bath 01382 204990

SWINDON & DISTRICT 8
26th April. Officially-sanctioned *Magic* tourney in Swindon.
Martin Steed 01793 532939 martin.steed@trw.com

DUDLEY BUG BALL 26th April
Dudley College of Technology, The Broadway, Dudley, West Midlands.

THE BLACK COUNTRY RPS'
annual big day out includes the last of this month's Duelists' Convocation officially-sanctioned *Magic* tournies. Trade stands £35. **Steve Turner**, 94 Laurel Road, Dudley, West Midlands, **01384 235244**, e-mail 101602.262@compuserve.com, web site http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/bonna

Glorantha Approaches

Chaosium and Avalon Hill part company to make way for new game.

COMING SOON

Games companies Chaosium and Avalon Hill have announced the end of their 14-year business relationship.

As a result of the agreement, Avalon Hill will retain the sole rights to the *RuneQuest* fantasy roleplaying system originally developed by Chaosium. All rights to the fantasy world of Glorantha, the original setting for *RuneQuest*, will revert to Chaosium. Avalon Hill will continue to sell its current stock of Gloranthan-based material, but no new Gloranthan books or supplements will be produced by the company from now on.

Chaosium is happy with the deal, because it negates any potential legal problems concerning the rights to Glorantha, which in turn clears the way for a new roleplaying game set in the popular world (regular readers might remember that **arcane** reported on this last year).

"This is another step in our own development of a full line of Gloranthan games and books," said Greg Stafford, president of Chaosium. "Avalon Hill can now pursue its own development and creative freedom with the *RuneQuest* line, and we wish them good luck with it".

The new Gloranthan roleplaying game from Chaosium is currently in development, and although no solid details have been announced concerning the system – not even its working title – expectations are certainly very high amongst gamers and other companies alike.

Chaosium is also intending to publish a number of other game lines based in Glorantha, including boardgames, a miniatures system, and a range of Gloranthan fiction.

As a step towards this, the company has also created a new distribution label for fan-based Gloranthan material, Duck Point Press. The label has been designed to "encourage the creativity and willingness to explore alternate viewpoints which characterizes much of Gloranthan fandom," said Chaosium. Duck Point Press releases will be distributed by Wizards Attic, a Chaosium subsidiary. The idea is that the new label will allow wide distribution for material that otherwise might never see print. Any readers out there interested in publishing their own Gloranthan material via Duck Point Press should contact Rob Heinsoo at `biturianv@aol.com` or contact Chaosium on 001 510 547 7681 for more information.

We'll be bringing you more news about both *RuneQuest* and Chaosium's new Gloranthan projects in future issues of **arcane**, just as soon as we can.

seymour

Despite being away with the fairies, Seymour won't have dodgy cockneys muckin' abaat wiv roleplaying.

Ahem concerned fermah owen mental elf. "Ear. Mayt! Ju real-eyes yorcor zing nob straak shnon ver PAYvment wivat mo'er? Vats bangaatv oar der san – nokit on v edorite? U camranear wivyer dod-jee-jam-jars mackinap v olskwayar. Leevit aaht!"

Ah du so lurve the telling vision sopopera *EastEnders* widits hard-cutting ex-posy on laaf in Lundeningerlund. But ah mess-ex-press mah concertina that Shaun Williamson, hoo plays motor merchant Barry Evans on the ayver poplar Sho – is wun of THE DARK ONES...

Gareth Jones, mah welsh collie in Svaamt'n, who will remayen naymles for fear of decriminalisation, informs me that he knew the relly vent thespien ah-for he played 'Duckin and Diving' and 'Dodging and Dealing' in *EastEnders'* Albert Squayar.

Mah collie admits that hewrit AAARG! the All-Adventure Action Roleplay Game for witch Mr Williamson was a playtester. Mah collie is involved in wraating ressy-peas in the booklets currently being given away on jars of Bisto. Thizizan insidious plot to make Mrs Jo Public believe that he is not the devil-worshipping naked pagan which he CLEARLY IS! Ah call upon all people to boycott Bisto and foodstuffs covered in brown-groovy maid from granules ov the stuff, witch is easy to extinguish from chocolate bah its smay-ell.

● **arcane** points out that Bisto is a market leader and that its product has never been associated with Satanic death cults. Until now, of course.

This month's SFX has an exclusive set report and pics from the latest Batman movie.
Holy exclusives!
Future Publishing
3001: in a rare major interview Arthur C Clarke talks about his continuing odyssey. LEXX: you'll either love it or loathe it, but SFX has all the early inside info on what promises to be the most bizarre SF TV series ever. STAR TREK: effects man Dan Curry reveals how CGI is being integrated into the Trek universe.
SFX ON SALE NOW!
PLUS: Season four of The X-Files and Lois And Clarke reviewed... Battle Of The Planets... Star Wars... V and Alien Nation producer, Ken Johnson... Frank Miller's Sin City... And loads, loads more...

Famous for 15 minutes

Jamie Foxall of Stourbridge and Tim Ellis of Sutton Coldfield are both fans of Bill Amend's *Fox Trot*. The comic strip collection features two brothers, Peter and Jason, who, in one scene, are reported to be sitting at a table surrounded by miniatures, multi-sided dice, character sheets and, you guessed it, a Dungeon Master's screen.

Listen to this: "As he touches the gold doorknob, 45,000 volts shoot through his body. Your elf is now charcoal. What does your wizard do?"

"He calls the Dungeon Master a jerk."

Which ties in rather neatly with what Steven Darlington is talking about on the Soapbox this month – see page 17, but not now, we haven't finished here yet. You see, here in the **arcane** office we can't help but notice that whenever you see roleplaying depicted, it's nearly always *Dungeons and Dragons*, isn't it?

"Oh, so you play roleplaying games... you mean like *Dungeons & Dragons?*" And then they imagine you running through the woods dressed up like an orc with an anorak on, bashing your mates with lengths of foam piping. So you try to explain that it's not necessarily quite like that, but you already know what they think. It's too late to try to change their minds. And, what's more, you really wish you weren't wearing your anorak right now.

But we care. We really do. So talk to us if you see *Dungeons & Dragons*, or any other roleplaying game, where it will be noticed by the general public, and if you're very lucky we might even send you one of our coveted **arcane** T-shirts. Then you can tear your anorak off your rippling torso to reveal the full splendour of your newest fashion accessory, and everyone will think you're totally cool after all and want to talk to you and touch you.

Write to us at: **15 Minutes, arcane, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW**
Or you can e-mail us at: arcane@futurenet.co.uk if you think you can claim one.

The Jawa Melting Pot

A pretty slick *Star Wars* fanzine.

The latest fanzine to reach our office is the *Jawa Melting Pot* from John Greenhalgh. It focuses exclusively on the *Star Wars* roleplaying game, offering loads of scenarios, new alien species, new vehicles and suchlike.

First impressions are good. He's selling it for £3 (not £3.70 as it says on the cover), but you do get 60 A4 pages for that. They're black and white, but are properly typeset, and the illustration isn't bad either – closer to the professional end of semi-professional.

The only potential problem with the *Jawa Melting Pot* is whether it can be sustained beyond the first few issues. The first issue has obviously been a labour of love, but as John Greenhalgh is doing most of the work himself, even doing it quarterly, as he proposes, may be too much of a strain.

That said, the lad done good this time, and if you're a *Star Wars* junkie you could certainly do a lot worse than buy this first issue. Contact John Greenhalgh, 1 Masefield Avenue, Radcliffe, Manchester, M26 3GZ or you can e-mail him at castiron@castiron.softnet.co.uk

Fair game

PBM companies form 'standards' association.

Britain's biggest play-by-mail companies have formed an umbrella organisation to safeguard basic standards in PBM games. The United Kingdom Postal Games Association's logo will be appearing on all the promotional literature and ads of the seven participating companies, guaranteeing a decent game. You can occasionally be ripped off by fly-by-night operators, so it's definitely a welcome innovation.

In order to use the logo the company must have been running for at least two years, offering value-for-money games and services; it must have actually forked out on computers rather than just making up random results as it goes along; the emphasis in the games must be on skill, not chance; and, finally, all the information held by the game provider must be confidential.

Membership of the UK Postal Games Association is currently restricted to: Championship League, Gaffa Games, Games by Mail, In off the Post, KJC, M&E Sports, and Software Simulations. Chairman of the organisation is Peter Wilson of In off the Post.

Given that there are now enough UK PBMers to fill a good-sized football stadium, Wilson reckons the formation of the association is timely. "With over 50,000 players actively involved in play-by-mail, we recognise the need to provide a quality product," he said. "Many regular players are youngsters and we acknowledge the investment they and many other subscribers make week-by-week. Hopefully, the formation of the Association will give them added confidence in their game provider."

The Association won't be a PBM 'police force' but if it gains credence it should help establish a 'minimum standard' for PBM games. The Association also states that if you aren't satisfied that a PBM company has tried to resolve any problems you may have with their game, you can contact the Association directly.

COMING SOON

Shadowrun supplements

Crime sourcebook and new adventures.

FASA's support for *Shadowrun* continues apace with the release of a new supplement, the *Underworld Sourcebook*, and an adventure book set in this background, *Mob War!*

The *Underworld Sourcebook* concentrates on all the various criminal factions of the *Shadowrun* world – everyone from the big four of the criminal world (the Mafia, the Triads, the Seoulpa Rings and the Yakuza) to smaller factions such as the Ork Underground. Shadowrunners look positively angelic by comparison.

Mob War! utilises this background. Seattle's most powerful kingpin is dead, and war is brewing on the streets. The battle lines are being drawn up, ready for the fight to see who gets the biggest slice of the underworld pie. And the shadowrunners, naturally, are in the eye of this hurricane.

Meanwhile, *Arcane Mysteries of the Barsaive* offers hundreds of new spells for *Earthdawn*, as well as talent knacks and magical items.

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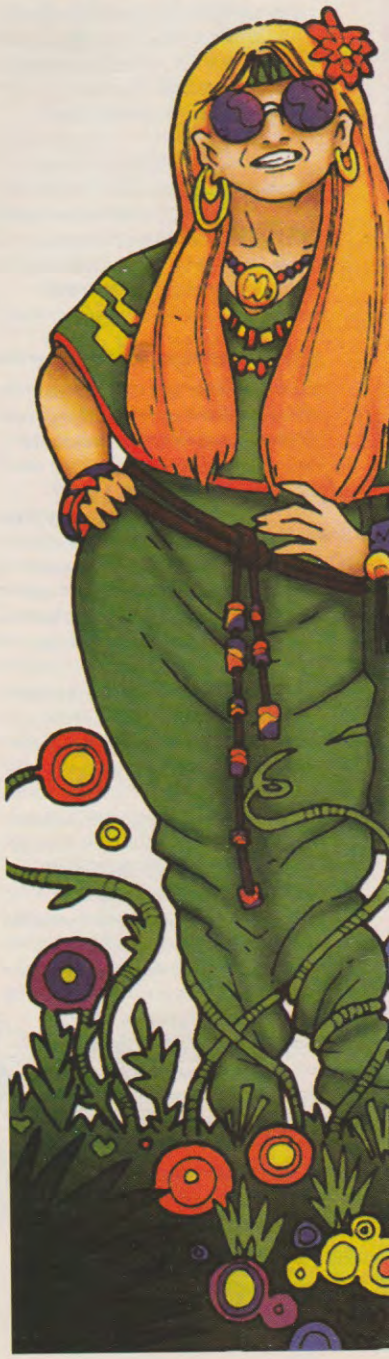


N a copy of Nomine

We've got ten copies of Steve Jackson's long-awaited devils-and-angels RPG to give away It's here!

Steve Jackson Games' *In Nomine* is on the shelves. It gets a pretty good review this issue (page 54), so many of you will rightly be quite content to spend £16.95 on the book. But TEN of you can get a copy for just the price of a stamp – and not one of those old rare ones with a funny name, either, just your standard one with the monarch's head on (or, er, something else if you're not from the UK).

Thanks to those kind-hearted folks at Steve Jackson Games we've got ten copies of the rulebook to give away. If you fancy winning what must be the longest-awaited roleplaying game ever, all you have to do is answer the wickedly tricky question below. If it's too hard, don't give up hope. Picking an answer at random still gives a 33.33% chance of yielding the correct one.

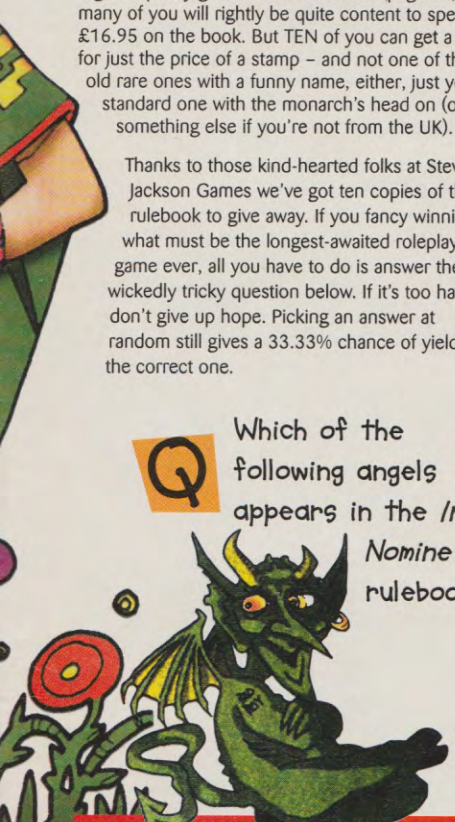
Q Which of the following angels appears in the *In Nomine* rulebook?

A. The Angel Islington
B. An angel fish
C. Archangel Gabriel

Just mark your entry 'Holy game giveaways!' and send it on a postcard or sealed down envelope to:

arcane,
Future Publishing Ltd,
30 Monmouth Street,
Bath,
BA1 2BW,
England.

Or you can e-mail arcane@futurenet.co.uk



NO STONE TABLET THIS TIME, BUT YOU'VE STILL GOT TO ADHERE TO THESE COMMANDMENTS

1. Entries must reach us before the Day of Revelation, when War, Death, Pestilence and the other one come galloping down the home straight of eternity – or before the 18th of March, if the DOR comes later than that.
2. Employees of Future Publishing and Steve Jackson Games are banned from this competition. As is anyone working for Lucifer or God in an ethereal capacity.
3. Anyone entering more than once will have their entries torn and be consigned to wait in purgatory for a long time.
4. Failing Divine Intervention, the editor's decision is final.

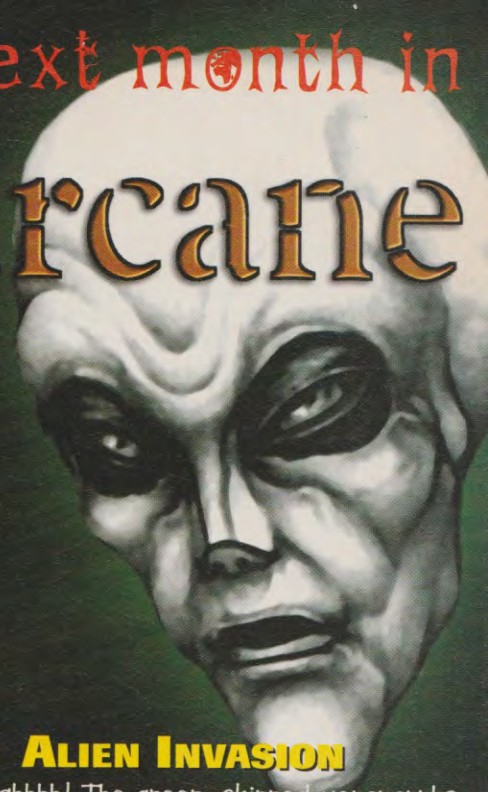
COMPO RESULTS

Reader's combo compo

In **arcane** 15, we ran a competition for you to win an entire box of *Visions* cards. We asked you to produce *Magic* combos using either Dark Privilege or Jamuuran Lion, the cards given away gratis on the cover of that same issue. Slowly, a mountain of postcards, letters and e-mail printouts began to form in the centre of the office. Then, once he had as many entries as his Sherpas could safely transport, Dan left England on a steam packet to spend the next 40 days and nights in Tibet examining the efficacy of your efforts, along with some *Magic*-playing monks he knows up there.

He has only recently returned, emotionally refreshed and sun-bronzed, and clasping a seemingly ancient parchment bearing the following legend: "James McArthur, Fife. Dark Privilege, Carrion, Ray of Command". Dan says lots of you sent in combos using Breeding Pit to fuel the regeneration that Dark Privilege gives, but that turning your opponent's Crash of Rhinos into maggots and using *them* to regenerate your creature was just a wee bit classier. "Rhinos into maggots indeed! Why the sheer cheek of it!" he chortled, happily. Anyway, congratulations on your winning combo, James.

next month in arcane



Alien Invasion

Oooo–lahhhh! The green–skinned xenomorphs are back and this time they don't plan on coming second. John Tynes shows you how to deal with aliens in your campaign, whether they advance with heat rays blazing like Wells's Martians or by stealth like the pod people in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Nasty.

Nobody's Perfect

There are few things duller than roleplaying an emotionless, invulnerable demi–god. Real people have problems and flaws. Good characters should have too. Steve Peterson talks you through it.

Kiiiii–yah!

'Waiter, there's a yakuza in my soup!' You asked for more specific Encounters, you got them. This month's is a restaurant in Chinatown. Run it sinister with *Call of Cthulhu* or run it wild with *Feng Shui*.

FREE! A complete stand–alone roleplaying game – rules, background, and more!

Plus Understanding how RPG magic works, the game of the book, how to run a club, and loads of reviews.

arcane 19 will be on sale on Friday 25th April

To make sure of getting your copy of arcane every month, either subscribe using the card in this issue, or fill in this handy form and give it to your newsagent.

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Saturday Night Live

are live-action games the ultimate roleplaying experience, or just another blind alley?

ANDREW RILSTONE

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

TWO ISSUES AGO, I SAID that the thing which first appealed to me about roleplaying games was the promise that they would allow me to stop just *reading* about fantasy worlds, and actually get inside one. I must now confess that they totally and completely failed to live up to this promise. I never did get to fly an X-Wing through the fields of Camelot or ride my horse through the Death Star. All I got to do was *talk* about it.

This probably won't come as much of a surprise to most readers. However vivid and intense your RPG experience might be – and when I get going, I can get very intense indeed, I can tell you – you are still sitting around a table in your front room, looking at dice and character sheets. There are occasional moments of great vividness when you can almost – almost – forget about the pencils, cold cups of tea and half-eaten sandwiches, and get completely caught up by the pictures in your head. But these moments are pretty rare. I wanted something more.

I'd been roleplaying maybe three years when a truly bizarre advertisement appeared in *White Dwarf*, which was at that time a games magazine. The advert was from a company called Treasure Trap who had bought a real castle (actually, a Victorian millionaire's folly) and claimed to be running live-action *Dungeons & Dragons* games there. These days, of course, anyone who has ever been near a roleplaying club or convention is quite familiar with the idea of live-action roleplaying, so it's hard to explain just what a weird idea this was when we first heard about it. I don't think I was the only one who thought it was some sort of elaborate April Fool joke.

So, I thought to myself: this is it. Tabletop roleplaying was a false start, a mere preparation for the real thing. I cobbled together some money and booked a weekend in the cold bunk-beds at Peckforton castle. Now, finally, it was going to be possible to stop just *playing* games about a fantasy world and actually get inside one.

And guess what? It still wasn't true.

It was, however, a whole lot of fun. We few, we happy few, ventured into the smoke-filled 'basic corridor' of our first ever live-action roleplaying game. We thought that we were the coolest, most realistic thing in the world, with our tunics and robes stitched together from old blankets, and cricket-bat shaped swords hacked out of foam rubber carry-mats and masking tape. ("We aren't going to sleep on them," I explained to the man in the camping shop, "We are going to make swords out of them." "Of course you are," he said, pityingly.) I shudder to think what LARPers of today with their professionally-made latex masks would have thought of the orcs, with joke-shop pigs' noses and green face paint. But it seemed real enough to us at the time. The candles, the lanterns, the semi-darkness, the blind panic when the first wave of monsters appeared – the feeling that a six foot tall Citadel miniature had come to life and was running full pelt towards you. You began to realise that much of what you had been saying in your *D&D* games for years ("I'll just hide the battleaxe under my cloak," "I listen at the door – how many of them are there?") was just plain stupid. For the first time you understood why the scout – the little guy with the iron nerves who nipped down dark corridors by himself to see what was there – was the most valuable and valued member of any party. In short, this was it. This was real.

For the first 20 minutes, at least.

This initial exhilaration faded almost as quickly as the first thrills of *Dungeons & Dragons* had. After a few scenarios, you started to remember that you were not 'really' in fantasy world – you were just standing in a field in a silly costume, waiting for a pointless fight with three people in unconvincing orc masks. Which is, when you think about it, no more real than sitting around a table waiting for a pointless fight with three unconvincing metal miniatures.

I now see that I had made a basic and fundamental error. I imagined that shifting the game off the tabletop and into the castle would magically make the experience 'real'. That is, I had mistaken the *mechanics* of the game for the game itself. Of course, in a very good game of LARP, you don't care that the swords are toys and the monsters would have embarrassed the *Doctor Who* special effects department on a bad day, because the story and the situation are so compelling that your imagination fills in the gaps. But then, that is true of a very good round-a-table game, too. The hyperbole that says swords, masks and scenery – simply in and of themselves – create a more realistic gaming experience is simply not true. Of course, there are some things that they do really well – not many dice and paper combat systems immerse you in the cut-and-thrust confusion and adrenaline rush of a pitched battle in the way that LARP can. But then, there are some things (such as a fight with a 20 foot tall giant made of solid glass) which LARPs can *never* do. They are tools, and every referee must chose the tool which best suits him – a different one for each occasion.

I guess I became disillusioned with LARPing for a less subtle reason, too: I'm too much of a congenital slob to find running around the woods bashing things fun, or at any rate, not for very long. It gives me Cthulhoid flashbacks to cross-country practice. But they certainly failed to deliver the Total Immersion Ultimate Roleplaying Experience that I was after.

I wonder if anything ever will?

"The hyperbole that swords, masks and scenery create a more realistic experience is simply not true."

LIVE-ACTION GAMES TO TRY

Live-action *Call of Cthulhu:* Find a large house which can pass for a gothic mansion. Hide clues around it and dress the players in 1920s' costumes. Let them solve the mystery.

Live-action *Cyberpunk:* Most roleplayers dress like *Cyberpunk* characters anyway. Most shopping centres look like cyberpunk worlds. If you could find a multi-story car park no one was using, you'd probably have the ultimate setting.

Live-action *Ars Magica:* While LARP simulations of spells are a little hard, wizardly councils and convocations are popular settings for freeform LARP parties.

LIVE-ACTION GAMES *NOT* TO TRY

Live-action *Toon:* You could rent furry costumes from the hire shop, fill the room with custard pies and even make foam rubber anvils. But who is going to put the giant trampoline under the cliff?

Live-action *Champions:* Very few men look sensible in tights. Even a good harness does not make you look as if you're flying. And, Del-Boy and Rodders notwithstanding, you'd get beaten up on the way to the event.

Live-action *Car Wars:* Although it is probably possible to fit Lazar Tag gear to the front and back of your car, it is almost certainly not legal.

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Play the game

It seems Steven Darlington is having trouble with his lot down in Brisbane. Here he reminds them, and the rest of us, that it's a happy referee who runs the best games.

WE ONLY WANT TO HAVE A LITTLE FUN

We all play these games to have fun, all of us. So, if the players stop the referee from having fun, he's going to ask himself why he bothered to go to all the effort of writing the scenario, planning the game, and even of turning up. Players should remember that if the referee doesn't get any reward for his labours, sooner or later he's going to wonder why he should continue. He could, after all, be a player in someone else's game at the drop of a hat.

BEING A GOOD REFEREE is all about keeping your players happy. You already knew that. But, shocking as it may seem, the opposite is also true: being a good player is all about keeping your referee happy.

This is not achieved simply by being a good roleplayer; it is achieved by respecting your referee and attempting, at all times, to make her job easier.

Here are a few tips on how to do this:

● Appreciate the job.

Never forget that the referee has the hardest job of all. Remember that the referee not only has to referee, she also has to be book-keeper and narrator, play every NPC and control the plot. Always keep in mind that this person has given up a lot of her spare time to entertain you with her ideas, while all you have to do is turn up. So, if something does go wrong and the game goes off the rails a bit, don't you think she deserves the chance to correct herself? Give her a break!

● Be sensitive to style.

Referees, like players, have a preferred style. Some like a specific genre. Others prefer scenarios to be like treasure hunts or mysteries. Some may like to run huge combats, while others go for intense roleplaying. Players should be ready to adjust to their referee as well as the other way around. If a new referee tried to get some gung-ho Rambos into a murder mystery, most players would quickly inform them to change their style or get out. But if only the referee is forced to change tack, the players will never stretch their roleplaying wings and new experiences will be missed. So, try to compromise.

● Provide feedback.

Referees love to get praise. That's what they spend all that time planning scenarios for; it's great fun to have people enjoy your work. So, if you like a scenario, or setting, or character, or playing style, tell your referee. Likewise, criticism is equally important. If you don't agree with a ruling, dislike the setting, or think your referee lacks story control, tell him. This is doubly important whenever your referee tries something new. The more you tell him what worked and what didn't, the better he is going to get at providing a good game for you. Don't be over-critical, though. If you complain all night about a few measly rules, you'll ruin the game.

> "If you want to keep playing your games, you must keep your referee interested in playing them, as well."

● Get into the game!

A referee's greatest challenge is to make the players actually believe in his world and feel what their characters are feeling. But it's like swimming upstream if the players won't meet him halfway. Why should the referee bother to roleplay every NPC if their players don't roleplay themselves? Why should he describe all the characters and scenes in great detail if the players don't listen and try to imagine them? The referee sets the stage and lights the lights but if nobody plays the parts, it's wasted time. The more you roleplay, the easier it is for the referee to suspend your disbelief.

● Be imaginative.

The referee's got it all down on paper. He's covered most of the main angles the PCs can take. The problem is that adhering too rigidly to his preconceived notions can make the game appear too scripted. While this may help the plot, the game becomes boring if the characters all follow well-trodden paths. It is much more fun and challenging for the referee if players do the unexpected and the imaginative, especially if it's in character for them to do so. A highly bizarre tactic, however, might catch the referee off guard. He'll never let such a plan succeed, simply because it's not an idea he'd ever considered. But nothing impresses a referee more than building a perfect deathtrap only to watch the characters escape it anyway, through the sheer power of their imagination.

● Go with the flow.

Being imaginative is great, but if taken too far, it can completely derail a game. Sometimes, it's better to follow the dramatic needs of a story. And drama must have its conventions. For example, if there's a climactic showdown, it is much more effective for it to take place during a raging thunderstorm. But watch the referee clench his teeth as the players decide to wait until morning to go after the villain. Even if you've figured out the entire module, go with the flow. You may have to be predictable, heroic, or even stupid in the service of the plot, but creating a good story is what it's all about. And, just because something is predictable, doesn't mean it's boring.

● Come prepared.

As I said before, the referee has the hardest job of all. So, there is no reason why, on top of everything else, he should also have to look out for the players. There is nothing more infuriating to a referee than players who turn up late, who forget their character sheets, dice, pencils, or those who forget the plot, or the mechanics. When players are so apathetic that they can't even remember when and where they're supposed to be playing, where they can't even be bothered to bring the tools of the trade with them, it sends a very strong message to the referee:

"If you can't be bothered, why should I be?"

REMEMBER WHO ELSE IS PLAYING

Successful roleplaying games are all about collaboration. The players and the referee have to work together to make the game enjoyable for everyone involved. This can only happen if there is mutual respect between players and referee. So consider this the next time things go a little astray; if the referee is willing to go out of her way to please you, don't you think you should make some effort to return the favour? To paraphrase JFK: "If you want to play good games, ask not what your referee can do for you, but rather what you can do for your referee!"

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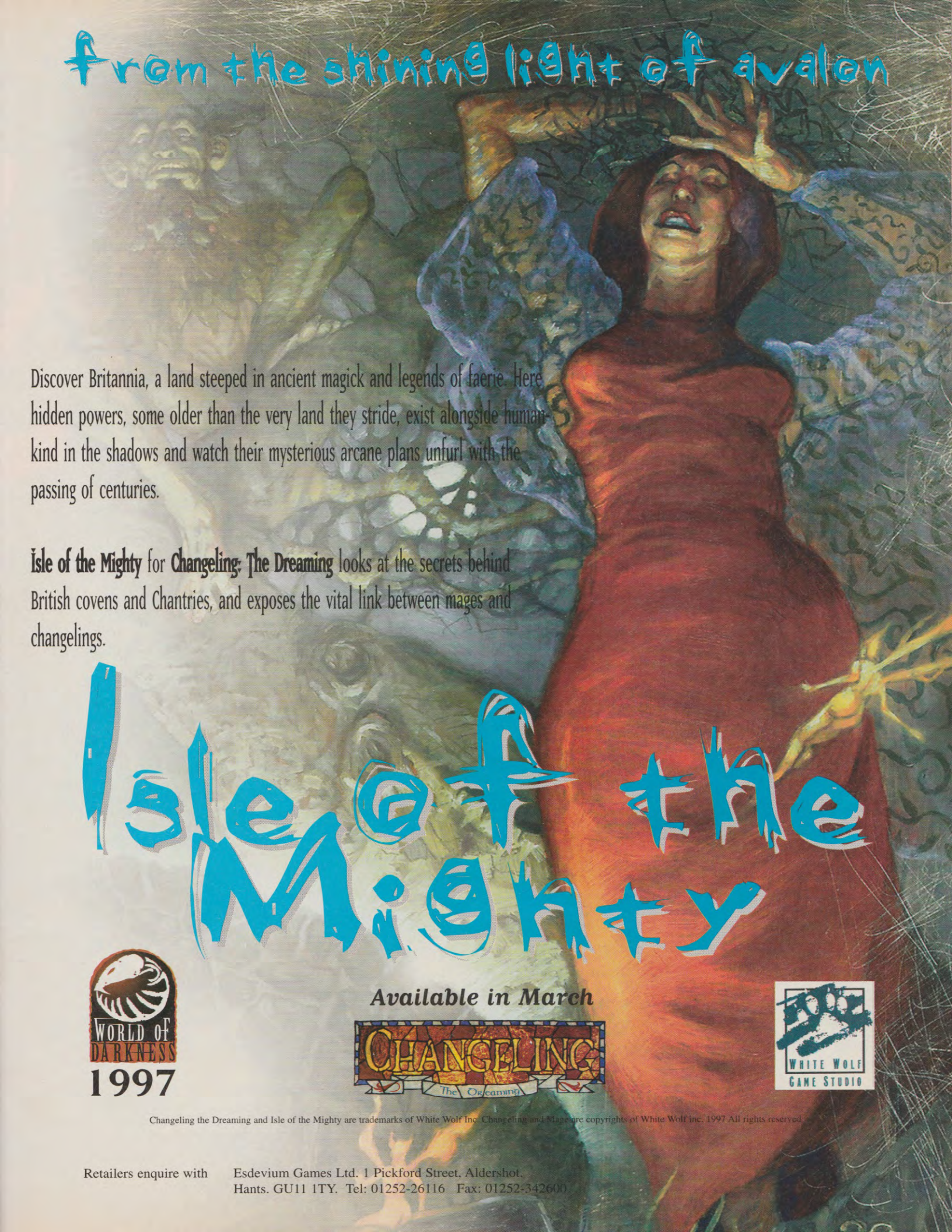
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How many monsters does it take to destroy a group of Cthulhu investigators? Just one, if it's the right monster. How many monsters does it take to sour a Cthulhu campaign? Again, just the one, if it's one too many. Chaosium writer **Sam Johnson** *makes some suggestions for controlling the pace of your Cthulhu campaign.*

illustration ©arcane by Alexis Liosatos

The chief goal of *Call of Cthulhu*, or any horror roleplaying game for that matter, is to achieve an atmosphere of horror and to scare the players. Monsters, especially Lovecraft's brilliantly twisted menagerie of aliens, ancient gods and extra-dimensional bogeymen, seem ideal tools in this regard, and many Keepers are tempted to throw a plethora of monsters at their players.

This approach, in the end, achieves the opposite effect from the one desired. While monsters are terrifying the first few times they appear, all horror is lost once the players grow accustomed to them, or begin to anticipate them. While their investigators may lose Sanity points by the bushel, the players aren't frightened in the least and the game has failed. The kind of familiarity so common to games like *AD&D* – where the players have memorised every spell effect, magic item and monster – are anathema to horror games. Remember, these are forces man was not meant to know! HP Lovecraft said it best himself: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." The less the players see and learn about the creatures of the Mythos, the more terrifying the creatures become. When it comes to cosmic horrors and eldritch monsters, less is definitely more.

Imagine if Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark* had been written as a published scenario. Only one creature? Who doesn't

Battle ye not with monsters

even appear until the end? Too boring. No doubt the author would have put some hideous thing up in the attic of the Church of Starry Wisdom to keep the adventure scary. Yet the story, as written, is able to build its suspense slowly and finally achieve a terrifying climax by holding the creature in reserve. The alien antagonists of *The Whisperer in Darkness* and *At the Mountains of Madness* are never seen by the narrator, yet the stories remain two of Lovecraft's most effective.

The *Call of Cthulhu* Keeper should learn to vary the pace of adventures and keep the monsters to a minimum. Two approaches are helpful here. First, the Keeper should minimize the number of beasts in Mythos-related investigations and carefully control how they are encountered. Second, Keepers should try to incorporate scenarios which, while frightening, don't involve the Mythos at all. Even the mundane world can be terrifying, if you look into the right – or rather, the wrong – corners.

Minimizing Monsters

In *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, Keepers do well to shift the conflict away from the alien entities or gods and down on to their human servants. Rather than battle endless hordes of Mi-Go, why not opt for an on-going clash with their human servants? Leave the players guessing who is pulling their adversaries' strings. When the investigators find evidence of the Mi-Go – clawed footprints, weird technology or buzzing phone voices – the focus is shifted from the monsters to the mystery. This makes the eventual revelation of the aliens all the more terrifying.

Alternatively, when monsters do appear, keep them hidden for as long as possible. Finding signs or spoor of a creature and seeing the mangled victims it leaves in its wake make the monster all the more terrifying when it finally pounces. Remember *Alien?* In his stories, Lovecraft proves time and again that just being near a monster is terrifying enough. Give tantalizing glimpses of the beast, making the investigators believe it's close… and then it's gone. Realising that what you don't see can indeed hurt you is a proven means of generating suspense and genuine horror.

> "H.P. Lovecraft said it best himself: 'The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown'."

Also, don't underestimate how resourceful a cult or a wizard can be as an adversary. Ephraim Waite, the body-snatching villain in *The Thing on the Doorstep* never needed to summon a hideous creature to do his bidding. Waite would prove an ideal nemesis for a campaign; he's smart, armed with lethal spells and can return from the grave if need be. No monsters required.

As regards cults, not every coven of the Old Ones need have a retinue of zombies. Suppose some of the worshippers aren't of the degenerate dance-naked-in-the-moonlight variety but rather have jobs at banks, newspapers or police departments. Investigators will soon learn that an army of knife-wielding thugs or a summoned creature can be the least of a cult's weapons. In the modern age, the damage a computer-savvy cultist could do to meddling interlopers is truly frightening…

Mundane Terrors

Individual *CoC* adventures often begin as investigations of something apparently mundane – the old abandoned house, the missing relative – and quickly turn into a confrontation with the forces of the Cthulhu Mythos. By designing adventures that use the opposite structure – the investigators go looking for Mythos creatures but instead find something ordinary – the Keeper can vary the pace of the campaign and keep the investigators guessing. Monsters and the terror of the Mythos shouldn't be omnipresent. If they were, the Earth would have been destroyed long ago. The cult that controls a monster, the spawn of the Great Old Ones and the insidious aliens should be needles in a haystack, the goals of a lifetime of investigation.

Red Herrings

In the mundane world, a number of things might attract the attentions of an investigative team, things that look like the influence of the Mythos but prove to have more ordinary origins. Some of these follow here:

Natural Causes

"The human virus bomb explodes… Then comes a sound like a bedsheet being torn in half, which is the sound of his bowels opening and venting blood… (*The Hot Zone*, Richard Preston)

Sometimes a death is just a death. Wealthy, eccentric collectors of arcane books and artifacts are just as susceptible to heart attacks or strokes as the rest of the population. But imagine the

"The mundane plots will make any eventual encounters with the full force of the Mythos that much more terrifying and rewarding."

investigators' suspicions, once they've earned the eternal enmity of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, when one of their friends, patrons or relatives passes away suddenly. Is some hideous sorcery involved? Is this the first strike in some scheme of vengeance? Let the paranoia run wild.

Additionally, strange diseases can, at first glance, seem the work of some kind of monster. Imagine finding an outlying village whose inhabitants all perished from Ebola, in pools of blood. Are the dead all victims of some hideous curse, or is there some vampiric terror on the loose? What if the investigators themselves become infected? The potential epidemic is more terrifying than a gaggle of rampaging shoggoths! Imagine a new virus the symptoms of which – mental degeneration, physical atrophy and a greying of the skin – match the calling cards of the Colour out of Space. Poisonous gasses or chemicals seeping up out of the earth could cause widespread mental degeneracy in a localized area, and lead to many sudden and unexplained deaths.

Beasts

"...we have come so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal..." (Dupin, The Murders in the Rue Morgue, Edgar Allen Poe)

Another sort of killer that falls into this category is a creature, but not a hideous beast from the pit of nightmare. What if a predatory animal was transported from its natural environment back into civilization? The hideously mutilated corpses found in the bay might look to be the victims of ghouls but are actually the work of alligators lurking in the sewers. Cujo proved that a rabid dog can breed quite a bit of terror under the right circumstances.

Poisonous animals usually generate the best scenario hooks. Remember, many toxins can be difficult to detect in an autopsy. Most lethal venoms can have quite gruesome after effects – grimaces of fear and/or terror, skin discolourations and so on. The poison of the Brown Recluse spider, found in the southern US, induces a slow rotting of the victim's skin and connective tissues, not unlike leprosy. People who died of a similar, faster-acting venom might easily be mistaken for the victims of shrivelling spells.

Crime

"He kills their kids, he kills their wives, he kills their parents and their parents' friends." (Verbal Kint in *The Usual Suspects,* Christopher McQuarrie)

Some of the strongest motivations of mankind remain greed, lust and jealousy. Crime is often the hook that puts investigators on the case, and some crimes often seem much more occult than they actually are. Keepers are encouraged to make mundane crimes nothing of the sort. In *The Sign of Four,* the culprits turn out to be a cannibalistic pygmy who can climb sheer walls and a man with a wooden leg. The murderer behind *The Case of the Speckled Band* used an exotic venomous snake as a murder weapon.

Usually, the identity of the victim is the easiest way for a Keeper to turn the crime into a Mythos red herring. An old man dies. He was killed alone in his study, all doors locked from the inside. A little digging discovers that the old man had one of the most extensive rare book collections in the world, and a sweeping collection of occult objects and primitive art as well. Looking through his journals, investigators find that he had battled the forces of the Mythos on several occasions. Seasoned investigators will, distracted by the clues, start looking for the signs of dimensional shamblers or intangible sorcerers. Actually the man was killed by a clever Mafia enforcer because he was late paying off the loan he took from Vinny the Ox to pay for that trip to Tibet.

Schemes to kill someone for insurance or inheritance money are so common that they're clichéd, but Keepers are urged to recall how elaborate some of these schemes can get. One common tactic from literature is to scare the victim to death – haunted houses, or the revival of family curses that result in an appeal to investigators for help. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* details one such scheme.

Organized crime can provide wonderful opportunities for a Keeper. A new hit man's in town, one who gouges out his victim's eyes as his calling card. On the surface, his growing string of victims have no links between them. Is some creature stalking the rooftops, or is a cult preying upon the innocent? Occult-looking calling cards or voodoo-style killings can easily seem the work of a cult. Are old business associates turning up at the bottom of the river? Investigators can easily jump to the wrong conclusion. Keepers are directed to Chaosium's *1990's Handbook,* which gives a marvellously detailed description of the various organized crime groups operating in the modern era.

Consider crimes that have political implications. The current wave of occult/government conspiracy mania, exemplified so well by *The X-Files,* has given 'security' and 'state secrets' all sorts of sinister connotations. Never forget, however, that governments can find many more conventional reasons for a cover-up. If a prominent politician accidentally killed his mistress, all the evidence of the crime

NO MONSTERS

Here are some examples of plots which appear to be the work of monsters, but in fact prove mundane.

The Hound of the Baskervilles, by Arthur Conan Doyle
APPARENT PLOT: A spectral hound stalks the moors. The Elder Baskerville sees the beast, which, legend has it, is the omen of a Baskerville's death. He dies of fright.
THE FACTS: Stapleton is using a mastiff painted with phosphorous to scare the Baskervilles to death and ruin the family.

The Crucible, by Arthur Miller
APPARENT PLOT: All the young girls of Salem Towne become afflicted by evil spirits and demons. Their agonies are obviously the work of a coven of witches.
THE FACTS: The girls, fearing punishment for dancing in the woods, are concocting the story to avoid punishment.

The Phantom of the Opera, by Gaston LeRoux
APPARENT PLOT: A ghost haunts the Paris opera, one obsessed with the success of soprano Christine Diae and bent on killing all who would oppose it.
THE FACTS: A deformed evil genius lurks in the catacombs beneath the opera house, and is trying to win Christine's love.

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, by Jules Verne
APPARENT PLOT: An horrific sea monster stalks the North Atlantic, destroying ships at its whim.
THE FACTS: The monster is actually a submarine, the Nautilus, under the command of Captain Nemo, whose hatred for war has turned into a hatred of mankind in general.

Scenario Seeds

A Plague of Ghouls

Bodies begin turning up in the sewers, prompting scared sanitation workers to strike. All the corpses are found hideously mutilated, with missing limbs and evidence that they were partially eaten by some large animal. Investigation turns up tales of a pale, unkempt man lurking about the cemetery by night. Is it the work of ghouls? In the end, the culprit is found to be a deranged indigent who has lived in the depths of the sewers with his dog for the past ten years. A gang war has been raging in the city's underworld and more hit targets than usual have ended up in the sewers. The indigent and his dog have been taking advantage of the improvement in their food supply.

Mojo Rising

A rash of ritualistic murders terrifies the city. The victims are found covered in blood, with voodoo paraphernalia scattered about the scene. Investigators knowledgeable about such things notice that the markings and rituals are not true voodoo magic but smack instead of the Cthulhu Mythos. While the police crack down on the new mob of Caribbean drug traffickers in the city, the investigators go looking for a cult. In fact, the killings are a smoke screen set up by a Hungarian gang to inflame public outrage and start a war between the Caribbeans and the police. The entire plot is the idea of Yakosh, a mid-level enforcer who inherited a copy of the *Necronomicon* as a family heirloom. While Yakosh doesn't know that much about voodoo, he has made ample use of the strange symbols in the old book, because they were the freakiest things he'd ever seen.

Strangers in Town

Imagine that a secretive group of foreigners arrives in town and starts requesting access to certain arcane books on the restricted list at the library. The investigators find that these people have travelled all over the world, were associated with several strange disappearances and disasters, and that several of them may have, at points, been institutionalised. Are they a cult bent on global domination? No, they're another group of intrepid investigators! The trail any steadfast Lovecraftian monster hunter leaves in public record would no doubt make them look pretty suspicious. Suppose these other investigators are looking into the same mystery as the players. What if the new arrivals mistook the players for the evil cult?

might vanish, and anyone who looked too closely might disappear too. The identity of the victim, or their relationship to the investigators, might lead the latter to believe a cult was at work. Once they start tangling with government agents, the investigators will quickly learn that a cult is the least of their worries.

Serial Killers

"If we catch John Doe, and he is the devil, if he actually is Satan himself, that might live up to our expectations." (Detective Somerset in *Seven*, Andrew Kevin Walker)

By far the most terrifying real-world phenomenon Keepers can base investigations around are the actions of lunatics, madmen and serial killers. Public fascination with homicidal maniacs is at an all-time high and the number of serial killings seems to be rising as well. Serial killers, by their very nature, share many qualities with the Mythos cultist or wizard – they lead double lives, carry on nefarious activities in secret, casually indulge in the most heinous crimes of necrophilia, cannibalism and torture (just to scratch the surface), and they plot their killings according to a complex agenda.

The most famous serial killers are real historical figures – Jack the Ripper, Jeffrey Dahmer and Charles Manson, to name but a few. Almost as famous are a new crop of killers from fiction – *Psycho's* Norman Bates (created by Mythos author Robert Bloch), Buffalo Bill and Hannibal Lector from *The Silence of the Lambs*, and John Doe from *Seven* – the author's personal pick for the scariest movie killer of all time.

Many killers, like Mythos cultists, see themselves as guided by spiritual forces – the Son of Sam believed he received his orders from a demon who lived next door, Manson saw himself as a Satanic messiah, Jack the Ripper left masonic messages with his victims and both the Yorkshire Ripper and *Seven's* John Doe claimed to be acting on instructions from God. 'Which God?' might be the question that leaps to an investigator's mind.

Most serial killers mutilate their victims. A string of bodies without eyes, or livers, or large sections of skin is bound to make any investigator nervous. Is someone gathering components for a spell? The mutilations also blur the line between a serial killer's victim and a cult's human sacrifice. What if a new ripper starts his killing spree, using a *modus operandi* that almost matches that of the Tcho Tchos the investigators wiped out last year? The players might breathe a sigh of relief when they conclude the killings are the work of a lone nut and not a cult, until the killer sets his sights on them.

Keepers should note that while serial killers are thought of as a modern phenomenon, there are gruesome examples from all three of *Call of Cthulhu's* conventional settings. Jack the Ripper plagued the 1890s and several others terrorised the 1920s – 'The Gorilla Murderer', Earle Leonard Nelson, started strangling women in 1926 and child murderer-cum-cannibal Albert Fish came to public attention in 1928.

Most modern treatments of serial killers concentrate on finding the method in the killer's madness. What made them what they are? Psychological trauma, usually at an early age, is a common characteristic among real world serial killers. What if the killer saw something terrible, such as an ancient cult offering up sacrifices to a Dark Young of Shub Niggurath? He kills now as worship, to keep the thing he saw at bay. The prayers to Shub Niggurath he scrawls in his victims' blood are bound to catch the investigators' attention. The killer's sacrifices aren't going to bring about the end of the world but how do the players know that? Keepers can easily use a mundane red herring like this as a hook into even bigger scenarios – after all, the cult or beast that drove the killer mad is still out there.

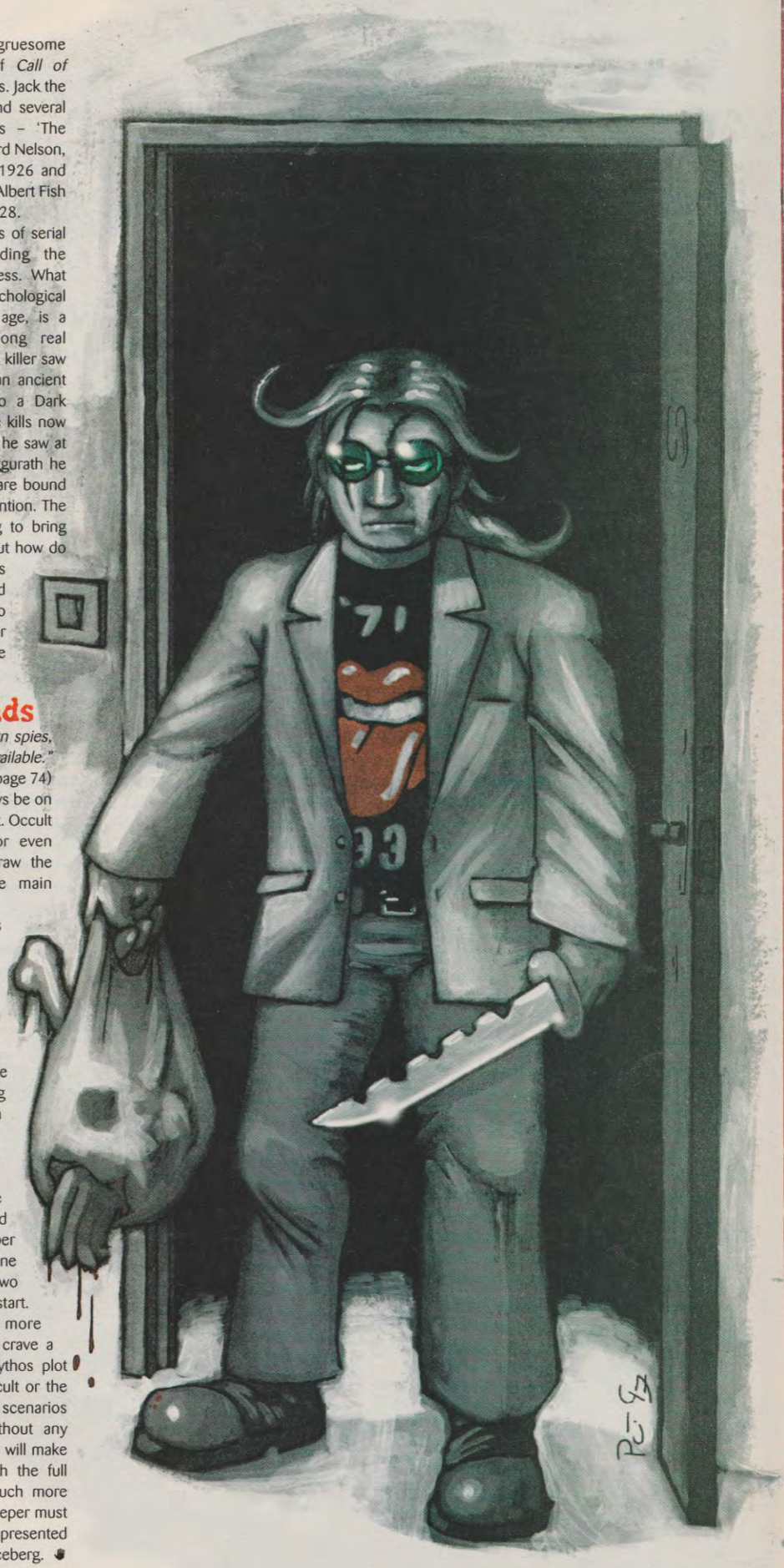
Odds and Ends

"Prohibition, gangsters, foreign spies, religious fanatics... are [all] available." (*Call of Cthulhu* 5th ed. rules, page 74)

The Keeper should always be on the lookout for a good sub plot. Occult or not, any adventurous, or even humourous, scenario can draw the players in and eclipse the main campaign plot for a while.

What if the investigators find themselves investigated? Some interesting scenarios could involve the investigators dealing with the repercussions of their past exploits. Is it just a coincidence that all of the players were spotted leaving the scene of the Brandenton mine disaster, the Corbitt mansion and the great unsolved cattle mutilation?

The number of mundane plots introduced should depend on the individual Keeper and his players. A mix of one mundane scenario for every two Mythos plots seems a good start. Some groups might want more beasties, while others might crave a more subtle approach. A Mythos plot could involve a branch of a cult or the recovery of some artifact, scenarios which can be terrifying without any monsters. The mundane plots will make any eventual encounters with the full force of the Mythos that much more terrifying and rewarding. A Keeper must be creative – the possibilities presented here are the tip of a devilish iceberg.



TALK OF

In Nomine is the brand new roleplaying game about demons and angels from steve jackson games. **steve faragher** talked to derek pearcy, its writer, and steve jackson, its publisher, to get the full story.

Steve Jackson

Steve, where did you first come across *In Nomine*?

In France, when I was a guest at a convention several years ago.

We hear the designer of the original French game, a chap called Croc, is an unusual fellow. What's he like?

A great guy. Lots of fun. He ran a game for me and a few of his friends, and we foiled a plot of Furfur, the Demon Prince of 'Hardcore' – in other words, metal music. Croc did all the demon voices…

So having played the game, what made you want to publish it?

It was *way different*. When I first saw it, the reaction was: "I like this, but not only can I not publish it, I hope the anti-game nuts in the States never even see it." But since then, the forces of BADD (see 'Religion & Roleplaying' panel) and the like have been so discredited that it's now possible to say the word 'demon' without risking a lynching in the press.

You had a few delays, though. How come?

One darn thing after another. Some of it me, some of it other people, some of it a detour into the trading-card fad.

Is *In Nomine* worth the wait?

I think so, and the mail I've been getting seems to agree… as long as we don't wait this long for the support material to come out. And we won't.

Tell us about the people who worked on it. We heard stories of a priest being involved in the production – true or false?

The designer, Derek Pearcy, is an old friend, a graphics whiz and a great creative writer. He has just *lived* this game for years now. He pretty well burned himself out getting it finished, and resigned his job here the day the proofs came in… but he remains interested and is continuing to participate as a freelancer in the development of the line. Everybody here likes Derek, and in a high-stress environment like a publishing company, that is saying a lot.

The artist, Dan Smith, is… well, he's Dan. His illustrations give the book a lot of its energy and flavour. He illustrates most of our *GURPS* books as well, and a lot of things for other game companies. He is huge fun to work with. When you say, "I dunno, draw something cool here," Dan always comes through.

Our line editor, Mike Sullivan, is a Roman Catholic parish priest, but he is not working on *In Nomine* in his official capacity – games are his hobby – and he really would rather not make a big deal out

Who the hell is Steve Jackson?

The first confusion to clear up is that there are two Steve Jacksons. At least. The Steve Jackson we interview here should not be confused with the British Steve Jackson who helped found Games Workshop and co-wrote *Fighting Fantasy* books with Ian Livingstone and now has an occasional column in the *Sunday Times* about games. No, that's the other, British, Steve Jackson.

This Steve Jackson is American, and has been a leading figure in the roleplaying industry for longer than the staff of **arcane** would like to admit that they can remember. He burst on to the gaming scene in the late '70s with his – now highly collectable – sets of games in little plastic boxes, the most famous of which are *Car Wars* and *Ogre*.

His company, Steve Jackson Games, is also behind *GURPS* (*Generic Universal Roleplaying System*) and the collectable card game *INWO* (*Illuminati: New World Order*).

Steve is one of the most active members of the roleplaying establishment and can be found at games conventions all over the world. When **arcane** last met up with him he was at Gaelcon in Dublin, suffering from a particularly virulent strain of flu. Ever one to incorporate his real-life experiences into his games, Steve promptly designed the *INWO* card Irish 'Flu.

His biggest claim to fame probably comes from the time he successfully sued the American Secret Service. During the compilation of a *GURPS* book on hacking, the offices of Steve Jackson Games were raided by over-eager American secret agents convinced they'd stumbled on a genuine guide for aspiring hackers. Steve successfully sued them for loss of earnings.

THE DEVIL

of it. Obviously, if he found the game 'evil' he'd have nothing to do with it, but his participation is certainly not a church stamp of approval. We chose him from several candidates, not because of his day job but because he had such a great understanding of the background – and the rules. He was one of our most valuable playtesters.

What do you think the religious right will make of it? Will Pat Buchanan be after your head?

Oh, probably. But it may be so over the top that they can't even wrap their minds around it. I have heard *nothing* from people of that ilk yet…

Is *In Nomine* one of those games that's a great idea, but hard to play, like *Nephilim*?

It's easy to play. The rules are very cinematic, very fast-moving. It compares very favourably with, say, the *Storyteller* system. It doesn't compare at all to *GURPS*, which is intended as an all-encompassing, realistic system.

It's not at all like *GURPS*, is it? Does this mark a new departure for Steve Jackson Games, or are you still dedicated to *GURPS*?

Well, both! This game needed and deserved a cinematic rule system, so it got one, but we will continue to support *GURPS* both by keeping the core in print and by bringing out new stuff. *GURPS Discworld* is coming soon…

So the question is, are we going to get *GURPS In Nomine*?

Conversions will be available free, on the Web, very soon.

Steve, thanks for your time. Is there anything else you want to tell us about the game?

Hit the Web site at:

`www.sjgames.com/in-nomine`

– lots of support up there, and more coming all the time. As far as new *In Nomine* material in the stores goes, the hardback rules and the ref screen (with an adventure) will be out soon, and the first supplement, *Night Music*, is almost ready for the printer.

Derek Patton Pearcy

Tell us about yourself. How long have you been gaming? How long have you worked in the industry?

I worked at Steve Jackson Games for over four and a half years. I'd gamed in the early '80s, but had dropped out until I started working for Steve. Loyd Blankenship hired me right out of college as their print buyer – I had a degree in graphic design. I started SJG's *Pyramid* magazine. Scott Haring, now the SJG managing editor, took over the editorial duties for *Pyramid*, and I went on to manage the art and production for projects like *Illuminati: New World Order*, *INWO Assassins*, *Dino Hunt* and *Knightmare Chess*.

If you had to describe *In Nomine* to someone, what would you say?

To someone outside gaming, I say: "It's a darkly satirical roleplaying game where people play angels and demons in the modern world." They return a weak smile.

To someone inside gaming: "It's that angel/demon thing that looked like it was never coming out. Yeah, that one."

I don't feel comfortable with most of the adjectives used to describe the game because they impose the speaker's prejudice on how the game should be played – dark and serious, light and funny, I've heard it described by lots of people in lots of ways.

If there's one thing I've learned in the past three years, it's that everyone has a different prejudice about what an angel/demon RPG should be like.

I'd much rather provide a setting, step back a few paces, and let people play it as they wish.

You've obviously been involved with *IN* for a long time now. What first drew you to the project?

It sounded like a cool idea; literally, I couldn't get it out of my head. A friend of mine had spent the first 18 years of his life in France, so we paid him to do some initial translations. It grew from there.

What have you changed from the French original?

I consider our game to be a superset of the original. I think we've added more than we've subtracted, though the humour of the original has been undeniably lessened. The line-up of Archangels and Demon Princes is a bit different, though the Demon Princes who are there are almost identical to their original French counterparts. We combined a few and changed their names – for example, our Asmodeus is a combination of a lesser Prince named Asmodée, Prince of the Game, and a more major one named Andromalius, Prince of Judgment. But Archangels like Gabriel and Eli are very different from their French counterparts, taking different roles in the overall story. Many of the stories we've foreshadowed in the core rules sprung from the French source material, while some are new.

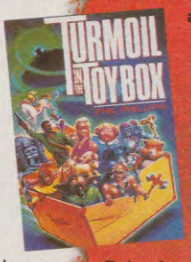
But the Choirs and Bands, resonance and dissonance, the Symphony – that's all our fault. The whole musical motif is from the American edition. The concept of Forces is also new. What else? Modelling hell after America was new; Lilith is new; so were the short stories up front. Celestial forms are new; so is being able to change vessels.

The power levels of characters were effectively doubled, which also made for a grainier system. But the d666 comes from the original game. It's a piece of genius.

There were lots of delays with *In Nomine* (I remember we covered it in arcane 1, and by then it was already late). What caused all those? Is it a better game for the waiting?

If I sat here and made a laundry list of everything that kept *In Nomine* from getting printed, we'd be here all day. I sincerely believe the project was – cursed? haunted? Whatever you want to call it. There was a little demon watching over this one.

But I have to say, it's a better game for the delay. It's a different game than it would've been two and a half years ago when we'd originally announced it, but it is a better game. I mean, it'd have to be. If I'd spent, off and on, an extra two and a half years raising my blood pressure over *In Nomine* and it hadn't gotten any better, I'd move to Mexico and spend the rest of my life living on the beach, eating beans and cleaning my wounds with tequila.



Steve Jackson tells us you resigned the day it was finished. Wanna tell us why?

It was done. More importantly, I was done. I'd had *In Nomine* hanging over my head for three and a half years, and I wanted to do something else for a little while. That, combined with everything else I'd accomplished in my tenure at Steve Jackson Games, made me feel good about moving on.

I started 1997 as a freelancer, and I'm loving it. Of course, my first freelance project was for *Night Music*, the first *In Nomine* supplement…

In Nomine

Based on a French game, *In Nomine* is an RPG that deals with the eternal battle between good and evil – and brings it bang up-to-date. The player characters are either Angels or Demons, or are humans who have sided with one or the other of the two sides in the eternal battle.

***In Nomine* started life as two different games: *In Nomine Satanis* (about the demons and devils) and *Magna Veritas* (about the good guys). They were both published in France – in French, *naturellement* – by a company called Ideojeux and were written by the man known only as 'Croc', a very active figure in the French roleplaying scene. The original games were very dark and cynical in tone, satirising Roman Catholicism particularly sharply.**

***In Nomine* is not part of the *GURPS* world, for which Steve Jackson Games is probably best known, and, as such, marks quite a departure for the American company.**

For a full, four-page review of *In Nomine*, turn to page 54.

Roleplaying & Religion

Roleplaying has always been a target for the Christian evangelical right in America, because of its association with magic and monsters. Seems they can't tell the difference between the real world and a fantasy one. Hmm.

In 1982 BADD (Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons) was founded by an American private investigator, Pat Pulling, after her son committed suicide; he was motivated, she claimed, by his passion for D&D. Although BADD has since been largely discredited and has gone to ground, the controversy still rages. As late as February last year, The 700 Club – a television show with wide American and world distribution hosted by leading evangelist Pat Robertson – was describing with horror the links between *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* and a case of serial sex assaults.

Given that evangelist Phil Phillips, in his book *Turmoil in the Toybox*, was horrified to discover that the *AD&D Monster Manual* contains 106 mentions of the word demon – presumably in the section on demons – one wonders what the evangelical right will make of *In Nomine*.

Being irresponsible types who like watching a good fight, particularly from the other side of an ocean, we're rather hoping that they're stung into action.

If you want to find out more about the debate on roleplaying & religion, we had a rather good feature about it in issue 6. Back issues are still available – details on page 52.

"For gamers who want RPGs to stretch their imaginations, space may be one of the most interesting settings possible."

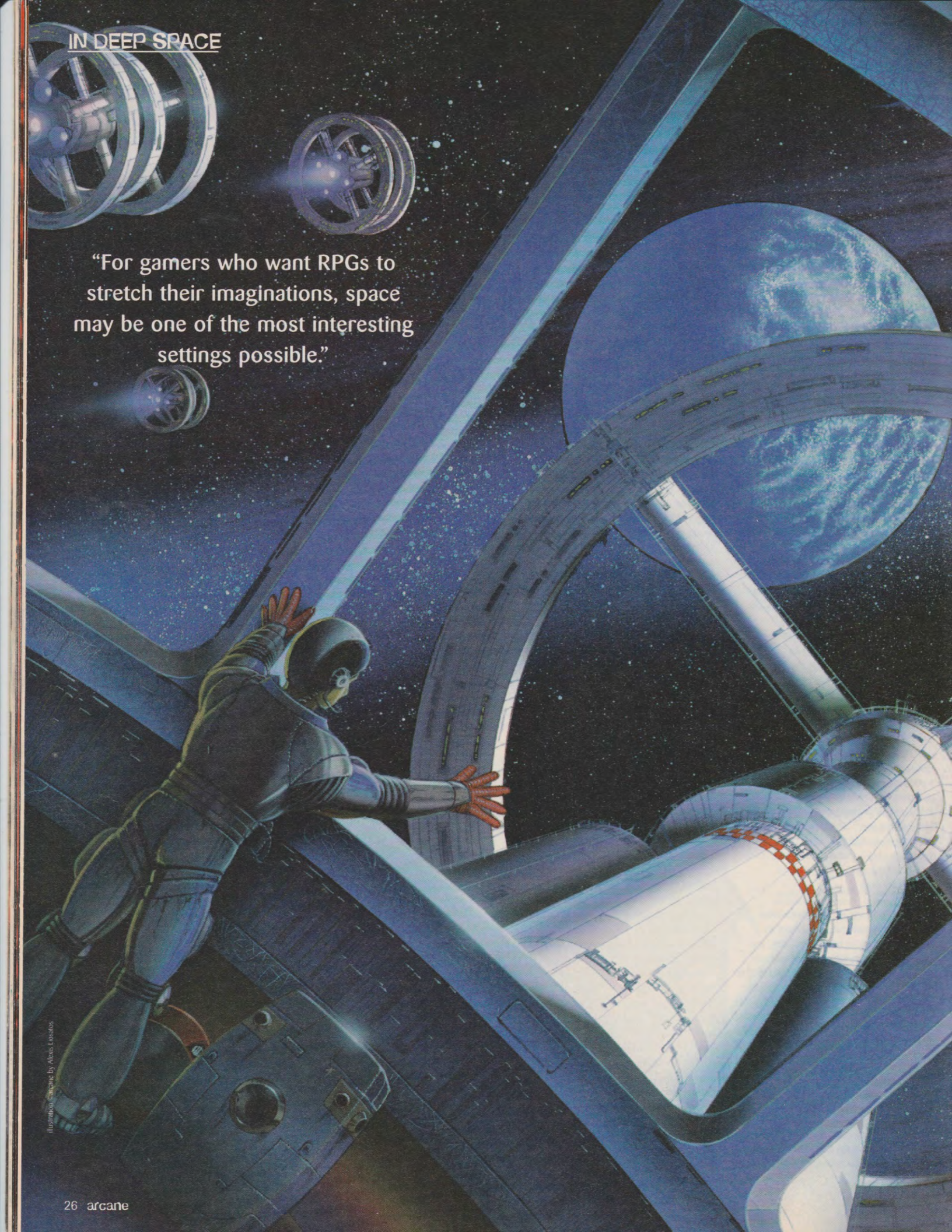


illustration concept by Alexis Lousios

Why on Earth...

It's the 25th century. You've got infallible life-support systems. You've got spaceships as big as Hawaii. And each week you end up on a planet that's suspiciously like a sand quarry in Kent. **Phil Masters** *makes the case for off-world roleplaying.*

There is a problem with SF stories and games about space travel – most of them have very little to do with space. Space, as Douglas Adams said, is big. Even planets, which look pretty large when you're standing on them, are just dots in that vast immensity. And yet most SF stories concentrate on the dots. Okay, maybe this is inevitable; if you've seen one cubic light year of vacuum, you've seen 'em all. However, that doesn't excuse the way many writers deal with the subject.

Mostly, what you get is planets treated as big islands. In *Star Trek*, an amazing number of these planets – along with caves inside asteroids, more often than not – turn out to be 'M-Class', with breathable atmospheres, gravity, edible fruit, humanoid inhabitants and no annoyingly allergenic native spores. Slightly more sophisticated stories and books introduce variant gravities (modifying characters' jumping and throwing distances) and the odd corrosive atmosphere (so that characters can worry about suit integrity), which is an advantage of not being tied to an FX budget and TV or movie audiences. But 'space' is still seen entirely as the gap between the settings. It may be a venue for battles, but otherwise the only use for spaceships is to act as a magic box that gets you from World A to World B, with maybe the odd hi-jacking on the way to keep the characters in trim.

This is not how things have to be. Space can be an interesting venue and a subject in itself. For gamers who want RPGs to stretch their imaginations, space may be one of the most interesting settings possible.

Exploiting Space

Having routine space travel implies several things, including widely available propulsion systems and efficient life support technology, so characters can probably operate in space for long periods. And the great thing about space is that certain things are freely available. Asteroids and large planetary ring systems probably contain a wide variety of minerals, and other chemicals can be acquired by 'scooping' gas giant atmospheres. You can run nuclear power plants with few worries about pollution. Even vacuum and zero gravity have industrial uses, and giant solar power plants, beaming energy down as microwaves, would be cleaner than most Earth-based power sources.

So space-based communities are likely to grow up. That doesn't mean everyone will emigrate; Earth-type planets have the advantages of stable, natural 'life support', varied biological resources, lots of minerals, and immunity to trivial accidents that could wipe out the largest space station. But at the very least there will be factories and research labs in orbit; if you have interstellar travel, there will probably be docks and shipyards, constructing and maintaining non-streamlined →

"There's no need to abandon the exotic and alien when concentrating on space-based life. After all, human beings needn't be the only ones to venture away from planets."

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY A GAME, DAVE?
A recent academic study on the psychological aspects of future Mars missions suggested that the crews should avoid competitive games such as chess, which could lead to dangerous rivalries, and should instead go in for cooperative amusements such as role-playing games.

EQUIPMENT
A space-going society will probably have many vac suit types, from cheap emergency kits through rugged worksuits and armoured combat gear to complex long-term-survival designs, all doubtless with pockets full of sensors and patch kits. If weapons are available at all, they may be limited to things that won't damage a hull – 'rubber bullets', tasers, stun guns.

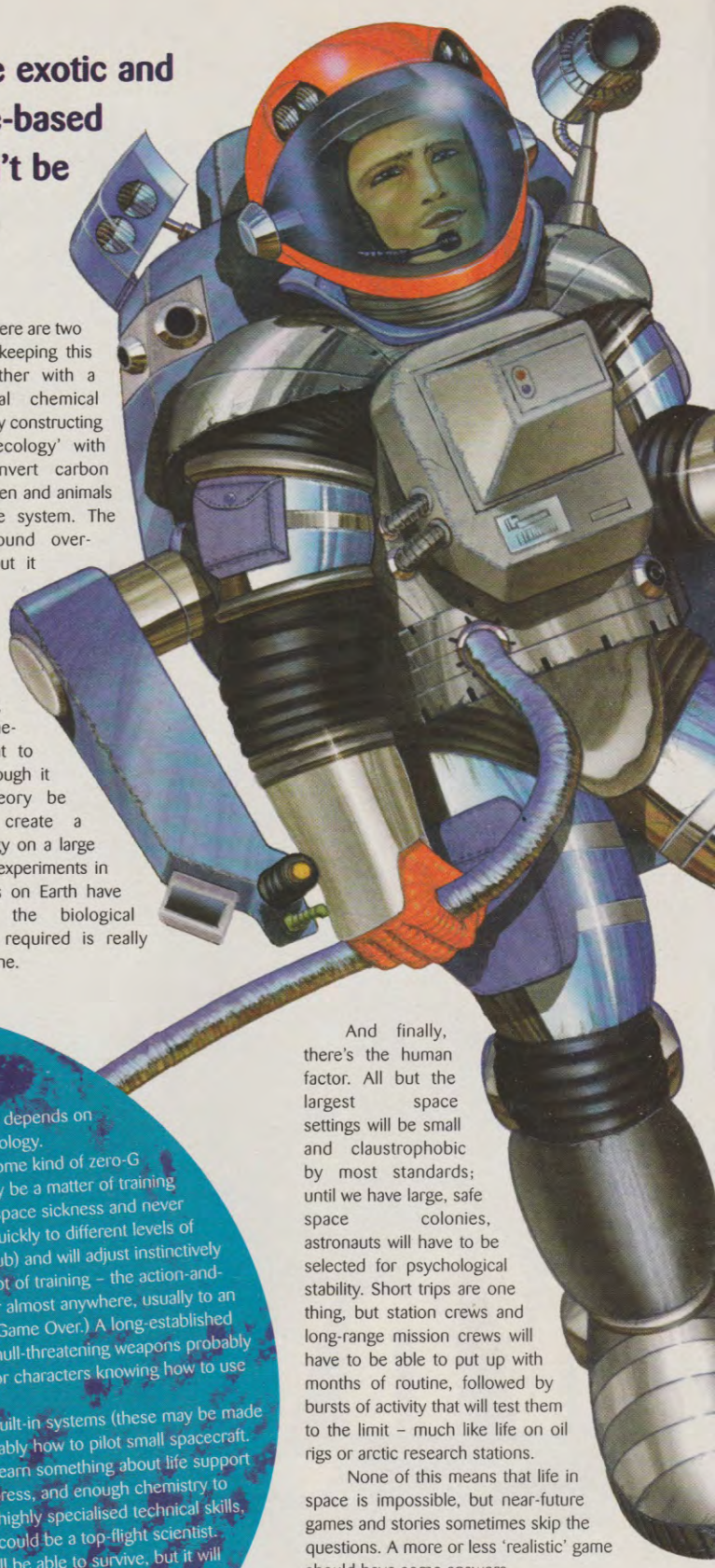
← starships. And once you've started to settle there, you have a good reason to try to make the space community as autonomous as possible.

This is because the most expensive and dangerous part of shipping anything between planet and space is hauling the mass up from the surface or lowering it down. Large bodies aren't called 'gravity wells' for nothing. These trips take fuel, and they force you to streamline and reinforce your craft against atmospheric drag. Such expenses should be minimised.

However, there are also problems with staying in space. To begin with, human biology isn't well adapted to weightlessness – an astronaut's skeleton deteriorates over time, so the longer they spend in space, the worse problems they have on returning to Earth. (There are other problems, too, including loss of muscle mass and body fluid redistribution.) Even in the short term, working in weightlessness can be tricky and disorientating, and some people never can adapt. Also, Earth's atmosphere screens us from radiation such as that thrown off by solar flares; a space station or ship would require heavy shielding, and life in space could leave body cells damaged and prone to cancer.

And, of course, if you aren't in the right place and moving at the right speed, you have no resources beyond what you've brought with you – no food, air, fuel or construction materials.

Talking of air, there are two likely ways of keeping this breathable: either with a totally artificial chemical 'scrubber', or by constructing a 'miniature ecology' with plants to convert carbon dioxide to oxygen and animals to balance the system. The latter may sound over-complicated, but it uses existing components and helps ensure food supplies, as well as giving the crew somewhere pleasant to relax. But although it should in theory be possible to create a working ecology on a large space station, experiments in sealed systems on Earth have shown that the biological balancing act required is really quite a tricky one.



FINAL FRONTIERSMEN

What abilities will space-going adventurers need? That depends on several factors, but primarily on available technology.

First, and despite *Star Trek*, it's hard to imagine that some kind of zero-G operations skill could not be important. This will probably mostly be a matter of training and acclimatisation, although some characters may be prone to space sickness and never comfortable in weightlessness. More capable workers will adapt quickly to different levels of gravity (say, as they move from the rim of a spinning station to the hub) and will adjust instinctively for Coriolis effects. Anyone who seriously wants to fight will need a lot of training – the action-and-reaction effects of firing a gun or swinging a blade could send a fighter almost anywhere, usually to an opponent's advantage. (And remember, one hole in your suit means Game Over.) A long-established space society might evolve a whole school of zero-G martial arts. With hull-threatening weapons probably tightly controlled and possibly hated, there could be a big advantage for characters knowing how to use fists, improvised clubs and knives.

Anyone operating outside should also know how to work a suit's built-in systems (these may be made as foolproof as possible, but errors could still easily be fatal) and probably how to pilot small spacecraft. And for those who spend a long time in space, it will be advisable to learn something about life support systems. At its most basic, this means knowing which buttons to press, and enough chemistry to understand emergency diagnostics. Long-term colonies will require highly specialised technical skills, perhaps including the care of artificial ecologies. The 'gardener' could be a top-flight scientist.

All this doesn't mean that only characters born in space will be able to survive, but it will always be good to have a few career spacers around. Also, remember that anyone trained for space by a large organisation will probably have been screened for psychological reliability, which reduces the range of disadvantages in points-based systems (unless the character cracked up after years of space duty).

In campaigns with advanced biotech, some characters might actually be genetically engineered spacers, maybe with radiation resistance and the ability to survive short-term exposure to vacuum.

And finally, there's the human factor. All but the largest space settings will be small and claustrophobic by most standards; until we have large, safe space colonies, astronauts will have to be selected for psychological stability. Short trips are one thing, but station crews and long-range mission crews will have to be able to put up with months of routine, followed by bursts of activity that will test them to the limit – much like life on oil rigs or arctic research stations.

None of this means that life in space is impossible, but near-future games and stories sometimes skip the questions. A more or less 'realistic' game should have some answers.

On Station

The simplest space-based setting for long-term play is a station. At its simplest, this means a cluster of 'tin cans' with labs, industrial units and power plants – see the current Russian designs, or NASA's near-future plans. A favourite idea from '50s and '60s SF, used in *2001: A Space*

Odyssey, is the wheel station, spun to provide gravity. This isn't a bad idea, but it proves harder than expected once anyone tries to work out the engineering. To begin with, the station has to be very big, or it would have to spin ridiculously fast, and the sideways-twisting effects of Coriolis forces would be excessive. But at a large scale the 'spokes' of the wheel are placed under a lot of tension, and the energy needed to spin it up is considerable. Wheel stations belong further into the future than once thought.

Still, even less elegant 'can clusters' provide a good setting for scenarios. In a more futuristic game with artificial gravity, stations can be made to seem less insecure and more permanent; oddly, although they no longer need to be spun, they are nonetheless often shown as wheel-shaped.

Talking of deep space stations, it's possible that bases might be placed a long way from any habitable world, but this would be a major project, so there would have to be a good reason. Refuelling, repair and trading posts might be useful, especially if jump drives have a limited range; there could also be local resources to exploit, from simple mineral-rich asteroids to weird exotica (such as sub-space wormholes). Military bases are another possibility, although these could be horribly vulnerable to attack.

But the most common plot function of the space station is as the SF equivalent of the bustling dock-front – "a port of call... for diplomats, hustlers, entrepreneurs and wanderers..."

Colonies

For a bigger, self-supporting base, the station can be expanded into a colony. This would, almost by definition, be big enough to be worth spinning up for gravity, and colonies are often depicted as rotating cylinders.

Favourite locations for near-future colonies are the Earth and the Moon's Lagrange Points. These are points where the gravity of two bodies cancels out; every pair has five such, of which two, L4 and L5, are stable. The scientist Gerard O'Neill suggested that these would be ideal locations for colonies built from materials mined from the Moon, and some SF refers to 'O'Neill colonies' or 'Lagrange Stations'.

One point to remember about spinning cylinders (often forgotten on TV) is that gravity falls away as one approaches the axis. If they are simply hollow, and assuming that they don't have giant fusion tubes providing artificial sunlight, this mostly means the possibility of zero-G hang-gliding, but there could also be some special facilities at the ends of the cylinders. Also, approaching ships would have to match the spin, one way or another, unless the colony has complicated counter-rotating docks.

Colonies can serve the same plot functions as stations, with the bonus that they have more room to support sub-cultures such as sleazy underworlds. (It's amazing how quickly Babylon 5 developed a slum district.) In addition, they can function like islands, holding complex societies. However, in all but very advanced futures they must have some limit to their size; think of them as cities, but not as nations or worlds. This in turn suggests that they might become rather introverted and claustrophobic – adventurers from such a background might want to get away from a place where everyone knows everyone else.

Rock-Hunting

One favourite SF subject is asteroid mining – the theory being that the asteroid belt may well include rocks with a valuable mineral content, or perhaps something more exotic (stories have suggested everything from magnetic monopoles to ancient alien technology). Small, cheap mining craft could locate and exploit these.

If belt mining does develop, colony-type bases will probably develop in the same orbit to support it. One idea used in Larry Niven's *Known Space* stories is 'bubble-forming'. Take a big cylindrical rock, drill into the core, plant a mass of ice and seal. Spin it up. Then heat the rock, which softens; then the heat reaches the water, which vaporises and expands, blowing the asteroid up into a big, spinning bubble. Let this cool, cut your way in, tidy up and to finish it all of, add atmosphere. Of course, bases don't have to be this complex.

Faced with the idea of mining in space, SF writers have generally been unable to miss treating the 'Belt' as the Klondike, full of tough, self-reliant miners, with the odd villainous claim-jumper. However, this isn't the only option; an integrated system of exploration and exploitation could be run by governments or megacorps (leading to cyberpunkish plots of high-powered intrigue), or the whole thing could be handled by advanced robots, despatching packages of semi-refined material back to planetary orbit.

PLOTLINES

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT: One of the deadliest threats to long-term space crews could be boredom. This in itself doesn't make for much in the way of plots, but both the possible consequences do, as do some counter-measures. Ships could be endangered or wrecked by a half-crazy, careless crew, or subtly sabotaged by a change to their psychoanalysis AI. Alternatively, characters could indulge in Virtual Reality amusements, or take training courses in bizarre academic skills (special prizes given for finding uses for these in the next plot.)

MACHANIST VS SHAPER: Anyone wanting ideas for space-going societies and plots should read Bruce Stirling's *Schismatrix* (recently re-issued, with a number of short stories in the same setting, as *Schismatrix Plus*). An adventure aboard a failing colony such as the Mare Tranquillitatis People's Cicumlunar Zaibatsu would be tense and tricky - the main objective would probably be to escape.

BURSTING BUBBLES: When a new asteroid base is due to be bubble-formed, lots of VIPs might come to watch. They shouldn't be allowed too close, but spacers – even important ones – are used to risk. This could make a few carefully-placed explosives a neat way of assassinating a lot of people. PCs who find out about this at the last moment would face the problem of stopping the big fusion spin-motors or deployment of the giant solar heat-mirrors.

CULTURE CLASH: In an SF game with FTL technology, there might have been a long historical period between the inventions of space flight and FTL. This might even have seen the construction of generation ships. So, a group of PCs, visiting an inhabited system is asked to investigate a strange object which turns out to be an ancient colony ship full of people whose mission is to settle this world. Some delicate arbitration is required!

Generation Gap

In the absence of propulsion systems that can approach or exceed light-speed, the only way to reach the stars will be by taking a long time. Given working space colony technology, this might be possible.

Generation starships have been appearing in SF for years. The first major example was Robert Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky*, and others include Brian Aldiss' *Non-Stop* and, most recently, Gene Wolfe's *Long Sun* series.

Assuming that air, food and water could be recycled indefinitely, the major questions about generation starships are going to be cultural. The classic plot involves the occupants reverting to savagery, but a different approach might make a change. For example, intermediate generations could transform their mission into a sacred quest, producing a society of fanatics. Certainly, to avoid boredom, in-breeding and stagnation, the ship would have to be big, with a varied, colourful society – but this might leave the crew disinterested in settling down as colonists on arrival at their destination.

The Others

This article has focused on a fairly realistic sort of SF gaming. However, there's no need to abandon the exotic and alien when concentrating on space-based life. After all, human beings needn't be the only ones to venture away from planets. Aliens might have been in space for a long time.

Given advanced biological engineering, it might be possible to adapt human beings to all sorts of environments. Ultimately, space, along with exotic worlds or the atmospheres of gas giants, could be settled by beings adapted from the human. But new environments, new body forms and new abilities could breed new psychologies and new societies.

The aliens could be human...

WRITTEN SOURCES
Several of John Varley's novels and short stories describe a strange space-based civilisation that develops after ultra-powerful aliens exile humanity from Earth. And many of CJ Cherryh's SF novels, dealing with a set of space-faring cultures, some human-run, others alien-dominated, are good on the complexities of mercantile relationships and the frantic claustrophobia of space war.

GOING DOWN
If humans adapt to life in space, venturing back on to planetary surfaces could be a dangerous adventure in itself, especially if the spacers have adapted to zero-G. See Fritz Leiber's *A Specter is Haunting Texas* for an amusing treatment of the theme, or Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* for an extreme planet/spacer split.

IN-SYSTEM
One RPG supplement that proved it is possible to run an entire campaign in just our solar system, without aliens or FTL travel, was *GURPS Terradyne.*

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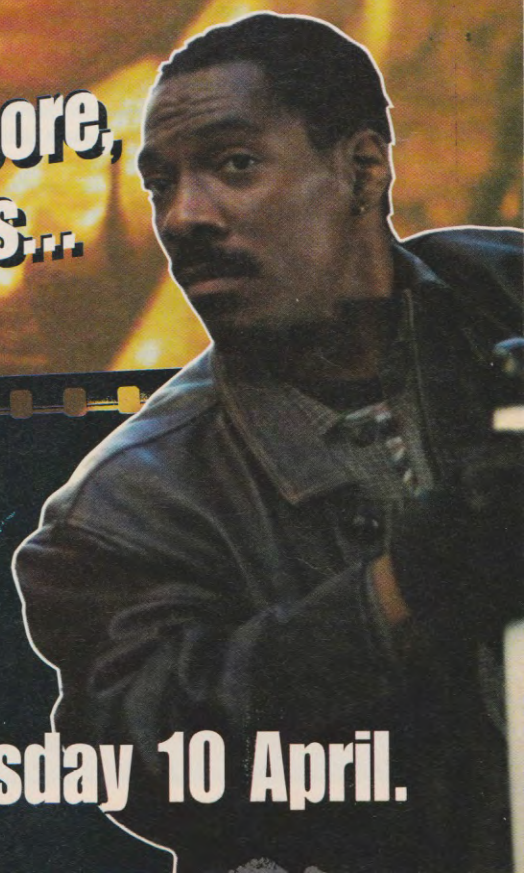

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during the execution of captured Jomsvikings by Earl Hako

asked each man to be

The book

The Viking culture is worthy of so much more than the occasional pirate or token berserker. **Graydon Saunders** *gathers his weaponry and embarks on a courageous voyage of Nordic discovery.*

HAVAMAL 1
For these things give
thanks at nightfall:
The day gone, a
guttered torch,
A sword tested, the
troth of a maid,
Ice crossed, ale drunk.

HAVAMAL 2
Of his knowledge
a man should
never boast,
Rather be sparing
of speech
When to his house a
wiser comes:
Seldom do those who
are silent
Make mistakes;
mother-wit
Is ever a faithful
friend.

Then a young man was led forward whose long hair was as golden as silk. Thorkell posed his usual question. He said, 'I have had the best part of my life, and I am not interested in living longer than those who have just fallen. Yet I don't want to be led by thralls to my death, but rather by a warrior who is of no less account than you are; and it won't be difficult to find someone. Let him hold the hair away from the head and pull the head sharply so the hair does not become bloodstained.' A hirdman came forward, took hold of the hair, and twisted it round his hands. Thorkell made a blow with a sword. At that very moment the young man pulled his head sharply so that the blow fell on the man who was holding the hair and cut off both his arms at the elbows. The other sprang up and said, 'Whose hands are in my hair?' Earl Hakon said, 'Things are turning out very badly. Kill him and all those who are left without delay, as these men are much too difficult for us to handle.' Earl Eiri'kir said, 'We want to know first who they are. And what is your name, young man?' He said, 'I am known as Sveinn'. The Earl asked, 'Who is your father?' He said, 'I am reputed to be Bu'i's son'. The Earl asked, 'How old are you?' He replied: 'If I survive this year then I shall be 18'. Earl Eiri'kir said, 'You shall survive it' – and made him a member of his own following."

(From NF Blake's 1962 translation of The Saga of the Jomsvikings)

This passage is the Norse ethos in a nutshell: stoic, fatalistic, brave and admiring of bravery, clever, highly conscious of family and of reputation, vengeful, generous and casually lethal.

A KEEN APPETITE
One morning one of Red Eric's carls ate noisily and greedily, ignoring what Eric was saying to the whole company, so Eric ordered a great kettle of porridge brought, and bade the carl eat it empty, if he was so hungry. The carl ate until his belt broke and his breeches split, then cried out to Eric, "Lord, kill me if you must, but not with porridge!"

Definitions

A 'viking' is a voyage to seek advantage by whatever honourable means comes to hand (exploration, raiding, trade or luck), or a man who goes on such a voyage, or

Norse treasure hoards

There are two words for 'lots of money in one place' in Nordic cultures, 'treasure' and 'hoard'.

The difference is that treasure circulates; it is given as gifts, it purchases the works of craftsmen, it is sacrificed for victory or good harvests, it is buried with the noble dead, while hoarded wealth does none of these things – its only function is to be kept secret and locked. This moral distinction between action and inaction is fundamental to Norse culture – active striving is good, inaction and apathy are bad and not just with valuable things.

Hoarding is unambiguously immoral. The worm that Sigifrith (Siegfried) the dragon-slayer killed, Fafnir, is a man transformed into a worm by greed. The same is said of Bu'i the Jomsviking, that he turned into a worm to guard his gold after the Jomsvikings were disbanded, and it is considered a universal characteristic of hoard-guardians to be uncanny and evil.

The giving of treasure, conversely, is seen as a virtue. Kings and nobles are called 'ring giver' (meaning gold or silver armrings) or 'ring hewer' (the practice of breaking off part of a gold or silver ring to give to a poet or other retainer in thanks or recognition), and it was a function of kings to give their retainers war gear. Almost no one actually buys a weapon or a mail shirt in a saga; they are all given as gifts, and the older something is the more fame it has and the more valuable it is. It is this process of gifting that binds a warband and king together. This can be a hard habit to get into for adventurers used to accumulating all the gold and gems they can; it is recommended for *AD&D* games that Norse adventurers only get experience points for treasure that they give away. In other systems, be sure to apply the appropriate social penalties to a stingy character – a reputation as a miser is an awful thing, and hard to live down.

No man is so generous he will gibe at accepting
A gift in return for a gift,
No man so rich that it really gives him
Pain to be repaid. *(Havamal)*

A generous person will be repaid; not always in the same way, but it is this process of gift giving that holds Norse communities together. There is a proverb that a farmer who gives his thralls good shoes shall get more work from them, and a king who is stingy with gold will be guarded by lesser warriors than a generous king.

and Earl Eiri'kir, the executioner, Thorkell,

executed what he thought about dying...

# of Norse

the act of going on such a voyage. The people who went on such voyages came from an offshoot Germanic culture referred to as 'Norse' (because it occupied the north of Europe). Norse culture can be hard to explain, but fortunately, the Icelanders kept and preserved many stories, called sagas, in the years between 1000 and 1500AD and these have not only come down to us, most of them are available in cheap Penguin Classics translations.

Norse economics

The fundamental Norse economic unit is the farm. A farm can be anything from the personal holdings of a prosperous nobleman and his sons to the holding of a single man who is not yet married – though he'd better marry soon because one person can't do all the work it takes to stay fed, clothed and housed.

All Norse farms have a central house, where the farmer lives. A farm might also include subsidiary houses, often barns (and if not, everyone and everything is crammed into one hall for the winter), a forge, a boatshed, animal pens or an oven (which is a construction of stone or brick inside which you can light a fire). A lack of chimneys means smoke holes in the roof, long open hearths, and close, dark halls at night or during the winter.

A farm has to make everything it possibly can for daily use, because trade is slow, expensive and erratic. The women of the farm weave (warp weighted loom), dye (all manner of vegetable dyes), sew clothes (bronze or bone needles), cook (spit roast or boil) and keep the kitchen garden. They also tend the wounded or sick, feed the hearth fire, brew, keep bees, milk cows or goats, and embroider.

The men of the house hunt (deer, elk, seal, walrus, whale and all sorts of fur-bearing animals or those that attack the stock), herd (sheep, swine, cattle, goats and horses), shear the sheep, plough, sow, reap, and thresh, fish, smelt and smith iron for tools, burn charcoal, gather the firewood, carve wood, build the houses, barns and ships, raid, trade and explore.

Illustration ©arcane by Alexis Liosatos

FROM THE WAKING OF ANGANTYR

Herdsman: To have come hither, all alone to this land of shadows, was sheer folly. Over fen and fold fires are soaring Graves are opening: let us go quickly.

Herevor: Fear not the fire, fear not the graves: Although the island be all aflame, Never shall warriors while they live Yield to terror. Tell me the way.

Everyone can spin, haul water, greet guests, compose poetry, eat together in the evening, drink mead and ale, and dance at festivals.

the gaming magazine arcane CAMPAIGN IDEAS

social standing

In Norse culture, your social standing is dependent on three things: your family, your reputation and your deeds.

Until you have deeds or reputation of your own, anyone who meets you assumes that you will act like your immediate family does. Deeds you have done turn into reputation, and are used to judge what you might do by the people around you. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which Norse cultures judged by deeds – a man who fought bravely and well simply *was* a noble man, no matter who his father was, and a coward likewise. Someone with neither gold nor gear to give was neither jarl nor king, and so on. This lead to a great deal of social mobility, and people whose status changed both up and down throughout their lives.

Reputation affects this, and your reputation might not match what you had actually done. If you have a reputation as a smith, a local landowner might set you up with a forge even if you come into his house penniless via shipwreck; if you aren't a good smith, the landowner is going to be displeased. People might also get a chance to prove themselves by boasts, although this is dangerous.

There are three traditional social classes – thralls (serfs), carls (freemen), and jarls (noblemen). Thralls are protected by laws, have economic but not civil rights and cannot own weapons. Carls are the whole class of free people, farms, artisans, shipwrights and so on; they are the economically dominant part of the population. Jarls are the people whose main business is war and government, and the carls are not subservient to them; carls can and do fight, it just isn't their main concern.

Women and boys under 14 are considered non-combatants, and there is a strong custom of allowing them to leave a farm or burgh (fort) before an

RIDDLES

Who is it sleeps in the hearth place
Created out of stone?
A lonely orphan, eager for damage.
There he shall live long. (Fire struck from flint.)

Who is the great one who goes over earth,
Devouring water and wood?
He fears no warrior but wind he dreads
And his sworn foe is the sun. (Fog.)

AN INCIDENT IN NJAL'S SAGA

When Njal was dead, and his house was burning, those of his family still alive implored Bergthora, Njal's wife, to leave the house with them. She replied, "Young I was married to Njalwe" and stayed in the house and died.

suggested systems

AD&D Vikings Historical Reference (TSR)

AD&D characters are too hard to kill – many a champion died by a single sword-stroke or an arrow out of the dark – and too constrained by the class and experience point systems to get a proper flavour for a Nordic campaign. The monsters of the northern stories are much more horrible than the *AD&D* versions; one troll emptied Hrothgar's Heorot for ten years, and two fire-breathing dragons is all there are.

GURPS Vikings

(Steve Jackson Games)

GURPS is fine for a Viking campaign if the group is disciplined about what they use – too much magic and too much armour and the characters become much too hard to kill, which is fine if you want to play *Last of the Viking Heroes* but loses the appropriate grim and fatalistic flavour somewhat. The book contains much practical information and detail on the period.

RuneQuest Vikings

(Avalon Hill)

Probably the best supplement in existence for any sort of historical or pseudo-historical Norse campaign. The artwork is dated but the material is just right, and the sheer danger inscribed in the *RuneQuest* rules in a low magic environment has players acting with an appropriate level of caution.

Pendragon

(Chaosium)

Excellent for enacting a family saga. For ideas, you can't do better than to read actual sagas. *Egil's Saga Skallagrimssonar* and the *Saga of the Jomsvikings* are short and bloody-minded enough for the most crazed adventurer; *Njal's Saga* is longer, and the plot is something the cleverest referee should be proud of pulling off in their game. *Beowulf*, especially the Rebsamen verse translation, is an excellent source for an 'English' feel appropriate to a Saxon in Arthur's court, and the *Elder Edda* provides a wealth of mythological images.

Werewolf: the Apocalypse

(White Wolf)

The World of Darkness background does not fit well with a Norse feel at all, but with appropriate tweaking by the referee a Werewolf game can be fun. Egil Skallagrimsson's grandfather Kveldulfr's name means 'twilight wolf' and he was said to be 'shape strong'; both are euphemisms for 'werewolf'. The neighbours would never mention it directly, but so long as you do your fighting elsewhere and don't cause trouble at home, no one is going to mind and you might be in demand for raiding parties. There are different kinds of 'shape strong', too; Brithjold Bjarki, Hrolfr Kraki's chief henchman, was a were-bear.

Harnmaster Ivinia and Orbaal modules

(Columbia Games)

The Harnmaster rules are a little too realistic for the proper saga spirit, but these Viking kingdoms on Kethira are well conceived and realised with fascinating political detail perfect for a viking campaign.

Traveller TNE: Star Vikings

(Game Designers' Workshop – out of print)

If you're going to do vikings in space, find a copy of H Beam Piper's *Space Viking*, which has hooks for around 100 game sessions in it. The problem with vikings in space is that you need a lot of money to have a worthwhile ship (ie. one the local navy can't vaporize with their first salvo). It works better if the characters are some definite part of the crew or the advance intelligence party.

attack is made. Some of the boys grow up to avenge their slain fathers; it is still a shameful deed to slay them before they are grown men.

Types of character

Following are the standard types of saga character, the sort of person who is likely to have a speaking part. There are many other sorts of characters – notably craftsmen, townsmen and the members of the literate and priestly classes, as well as carls and thralls – but none of these people are likely to travel far from where they were born or see very much of the world, so they make less suitable adventuring characters.

Viking: Someone who adventures, a Viking must be able to fight, speak well and in foreign languages, handle a ship and deal cheerfully any with reversals of fortune that arise.

Queen/Jarl's wife: A queen hopes to be the mother of heroes, gives gifts in her own right and might have her own warband. She defines precedence in the hall by the order in which she pours mead or ale for the warriors to drink, and schemes politically on her own behalf or that of her husband or children. Many queens in the sagas know magic.

Spaekona: A prophetess. Treated with great respect, a spaekona travels from farm to farm foretelling from a trance and working small cures. Feared, more than liked, a spaekona character can either be a charlatan or have real abilities. (Referees who inflict accurate, if cryptic, prophecies on charlatans can have a lot of fun.)

Berserk: A member of an ecstatic death cult, a berserk goes into a fit when fighting and becomes prodigiously strong, feeling neither wounds nor fatigue until either slain or when the battle is over. Some berserks undergo strange changes when fighting. They might take on the form of an animal, or become immune to the effects of fire or weapons. Because they often cannot prevent their rages or tell friend from foe, many berserks are shunned and considered bad neighbours.

Farmer: The owner of a farm or their heir, a farmer needs to have much lore of animals, weather and crops, good political skills to stay on friendly terms with their neighbours, and some fighting skills to defend their own from feuds or raids. Most free people are farmers, or relatives of farmers.

Scald: A poet. A scald wants to be attached to the court of a generous king or jarl, although they might have to wander a long time before finding a position. A scald must be able to extemporize poetry and understand kennings (poetic metaphors). For example, 'flame of the play of the sea-bull's side' means 'a sword' – the sea bull is a ship, the play of a ship's side is battle, and the flame of battle is a sword. A good scald will know thousands of these, and many riddles.

Smith: Historically, there was a lot of iron in Scandinavia. Almost every man knew some smithcraft and any farm would have many iron tools. A professional smith is an exceptional weaponsmith or jeweller or both; the saga of Weyland/Volundr details the career of such a person.

Warrior: Someone in a king or earl's warband, who gives loyalty on to death in return for material support now. They must be able to fight well, be extremely brave and should know a little poetry and their lineage. The only two excuses acceptable for surviving your lord's death in battle are killing everyone on the other side or being wounded and unconscious at the time; many warbands commit suicide with their lord or fight to the last.

magic

There are three kinds of Norse magic: galdr, seidhr, and rune magic. Galdr is, literally, 'singing

HAVAMAL 3

A snapping bow,
a burning flame,
A grinning wolf,
a grunting boar,
A raucous crow,
a rootless tree,
A breaking wave,
a boiling kettle,
A flying arrow,
an ebbing tide,
A coiled adder,
the ice of a night,
A bride's bed-talk,
a broad sword,
A bear's play,
a prince's children,
A witch's welcome, the
wit of a slave,
A sick calf, a corpse
still fresh,
A brother's killer
encountered upon
the highway, a house
half-burned,
A racing stallion who
has wrenched a leg,
Are never safe; let no
one trust them.

magic', and involves the use of chants and invocations, repeated sounds and poetry. This is one of the sorts of magic Odin teaches.

Seidhr is a shamanic sort of magic, involving the invocation of (often ancestor) spirits, the brewing of potions and the use of dark forces. It is generally thought inappropriate for a man to have knowledge of seidhr. This is the sort of magic Freya invented.

Rune magic involves the carving and staining (with blood, usually yours) of the appropriate runes. This is the other sort of magic Odin teaches.

Many people learn charms from their dead ancestors in dreams, or through interactions with disguised gods, but there is very little in the way of a 'wizard' class of people. There are soothsayers – a spaeman or a spaekona – but actual workers of magic are treated with fear and suspicion.

Religion

Norse religious practice was diverse, with elements of ancestor worship, reverence for local place spirits, and the polytheistic worship of many deities. Means of worship was by invocation and sacrifice; this could be private, by families, or public, depending on the worshipper's means.

Some people have a god or goddess with whom they keep 'their foremost troth'; others prefer to trust in their own 'might and main' and follow no gods at all. Even these people are polite to the gods; they will not sacrifice to them, but they will not chide those who do.

The most important groups of deities are the Aesir, sky and sea gods, represented by Tyr, Odin, Thor, Aegir and Heimdjal; the Vanir, gods of the earth and the fertile waters, represented by Frey and Freya, Nerthus and Njord; and the various goddesses who married into these two families – Sif, Frigga, Eir, Ran and Skadhi. Paul Bauschatz's *The Well and the Tree* and many books by Hilda Ellis-Davidson and E.O.G. Turville-Petre are excellent cosmology and mythic references.

stories

The most famous stories are the Lays of Helgi Hundingsbana and the Saga of the Volsungs, but many heroes and gods have their tales told, with local variations and versions. It is the objective of everyone brave to be remembered forever for their deeds.

creatures

Monsters come in two main sorts: the ettin folk (which means 'eaters' – trolls, stupid giants, troll-wives and things like Grendel) and undead. The risen corpse of a dead man is called a draugr, and there are many other sorts of malign ghostlike creature.

The wise giants, the Jotun-folk, are of the kin of the Gods and are much too powerful for adventurers to try to deal with. Beasts are thought of as things that are hunted, rather than as actually being monstrous.

scenario seeds

Adventures typically take place in five places: at a farm, at a mead-hall maintained by a king or noble, at sea, at a Thing or law case, or in a foreign country. (There are towns, of course, but very little ever seems to happen there.)

Feud: In a culture such as this one, which is not averse to taking vengeance, the number of enemies multiplies; if the characters kill someone, that person's kinfolk may seek revenge. Note the distinction between killing – which is when you own up to the deed promptly, and fight someone to their face – and murder, which is when you kill secretly.

Killing has lesser penalties in law and custom. The canonical example of vengeance out of control is *Njal's Saga,* which is a great source of ideas.

Viking: Sailing off to increase one's fortune; this can lead to battles, interviews with kings, strange foreign sorceries and peculiar dooms. Be sure to make viking a matter of reversal of luck and fortune, requiring great personal perseverance and determination; this is an almost universal saga convention and makes for some great games.

Stranger at the gate: Hospitality is the duty of anyone, whatever their station, so what do the characters do if a stranger shows up and requests it? Odin has been known to come visiting unexpectedly, and wreaked a terrible vengeance on his foster-son Geirrod, who placed him between two fires when he would not give his name. A king's spy, a travelling scald or a man fleeing blood-feud might also come unexpectedly to the gates.

Restless dead: When the dead walk, they do it in winter, and they try to get back into the house where they lived in life. Draugr turn Hel-blue (a blue-black colour like a severe bruise), swell up and become monstrously strong; they are prone to trying to batter in the roof. You could have one succeed just when the scald is getting to the best part, or make the characters decide what to do, in the short days of winter, when there has been pounding on the roof all night and the tracks lead back to a grave-mound.

Thing: A Thing is a cross between a legislative assembly and a law court. There are district Things, Things held at the court of noblemen, and Things that are meetings of chieftains, such as the annual Althing of the kingless Icelanders. Law cases get heard, guilt decided, border disputes resolved and feuds settled at a Thing, and it is advisable to be able to speak well or have a friend that does when you go to one.

Typical penalties for serious crimes are fines (wergeld, seven times a man's customary annual income for a death), the lesser outlawry (being banished for three or seven years), the greater outlawry (being banished until you died), or death. Outlawry meant that you had no protection from the law.

Unscrupulous people will try to use the Thing to their advantage, and family members will surely try to use a Thing to get justice for their slain relatives. Even kings can find the decisions binding, although a king can usually find a way to escape being held guilty himself.

HAVAMAL 4

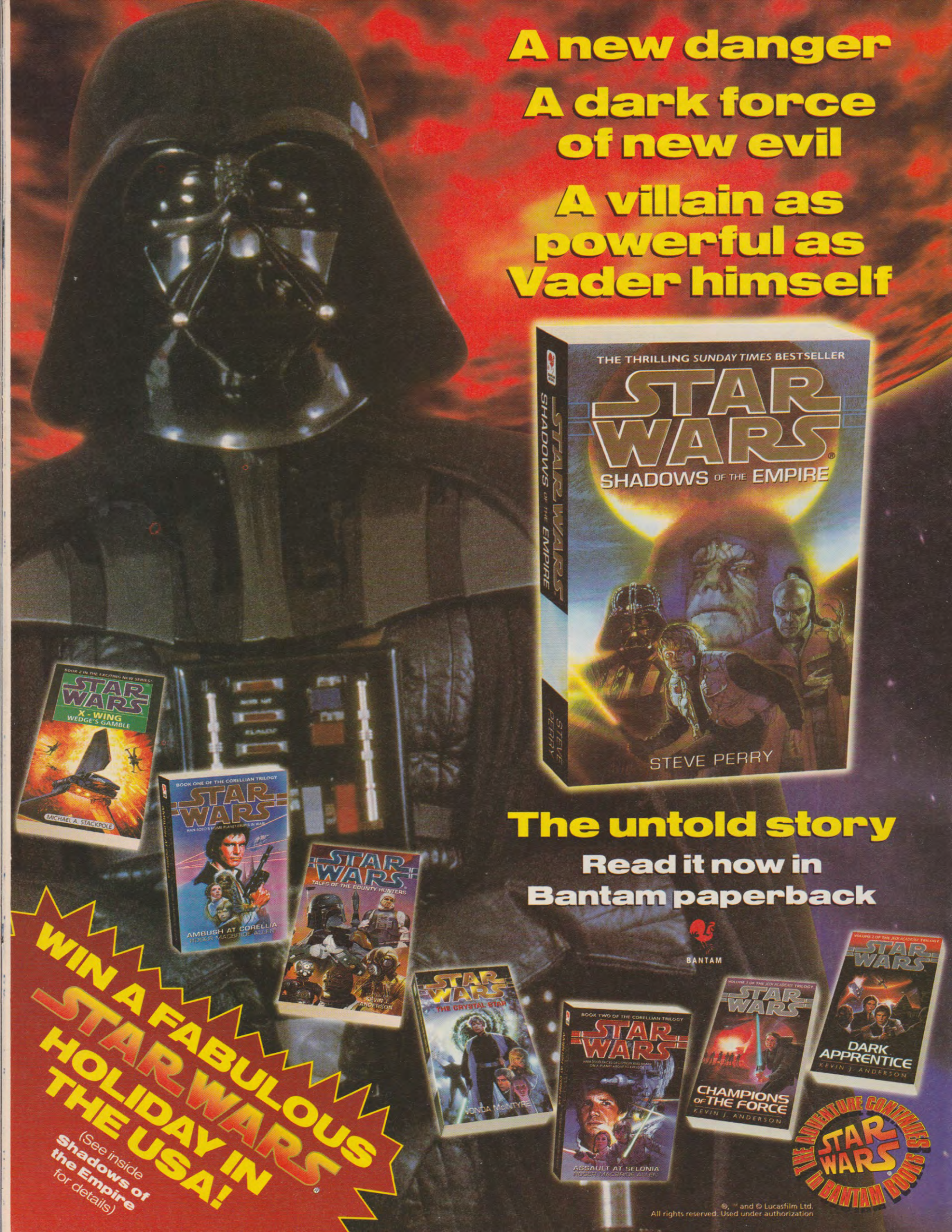
The coward believes
he will live forever
If he holds
back in battle.
But in old age he
shall have no peace
Though spears have
spared his limbs.

AN INCIDENT IN NJAL'S SAGA

When a group of men went by night to burn Gunnar in his house, they thought that first it would be wise to ensure that Gunnar was home. So they sent one from their number to climb the roof and look in the smoke hole and see if Gunnar was there. Gunnar saw the face at the smoke hole, snatched up his halberd, and stabbed upwards between the planks of the roof; the man fell off the roof, and went back to his companions, who asked him if Gunnar was home. "I cannot speak for Gunnar," he said, "but his halberd certainly is." Then he fell down and died.

DO AS YOUR MASTER DOES

(When Egil Skallagrimsson's host tried to get him drunk enough to rob.) But Egil found this would not do. He got to his feet and walked across the floor to where A'rmo'd was sitting, took hold of him by the shoulders with his hands and bent him backwards against the posts. Next Egil puked up from inside him a great spew, and it gushed into A'rmo'd's face, into his eyes and nostrils and into his mouth, and so ran down over his chest, until A'rmo'd was pretty well smothered. And when he was able to breath out, he gushed up *his* spew. All of A'rmo'd's houscarles who were by swore that Egil must be branded the beastliest of mankind, and the worst-conducted ruffian alive, if he would not go outside when he wanted to spew, and not make a show of himself in the drinking hall. "No need to blame me," said Egil. "I am only doing as the master does. He is spewing with all his might, no less than I.



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PULL OUT AND KEEP
The eighteenth in a series of collectable encounters from arcane
#18
The foremost technological marvel of the age, the vast airship Pride of Illyria, is packed with distinguished guests for a transatlantic flight that everyone hopes will be quiet and trouble-free...
the roleplaying magazine
arcane
PRESENTS
AIRSHIP
THE PRIDE OF
ILLYRIA
by Ken and Jo Walton

Airship

The Pride of Illyria

This month we're aboard The Pride of Illyria in an encounter suitable for use with Castle Falkenstein or any alternative 1900-1939 game.

From the diary of Sir Andrew Cutler.

August 2nd, 1913.

King Orsino would insist on coming along on this voyage. I couldn't think of any way to stop him mingling with the passengers either, because he'd insist on going to the smoking lounge. He said it gave the best view of the ground, but I knew he just liked to smoke his pipe. There was no way I'd be able to keep him safe. I always worry about him aboard The Pride of Illyria. The thing's a sixth of a mile long and full of inflammable gas – nobody can tell me that's safe. It was invented by a madman, and to make matters worse the madman would be along on this trip too. Zadok. The place would be so peaceful without him.

I thought it would be a quiet enough job for a retired Englishman, looking after security in a sleepy little place like Illyria. But there's been little peace and quiet since Zadok came back from Germany with his mad ideas about building a giant airship. I never thought it would get anywhere, but he persuaded his brother, Count Zadok, to put up enough of the cash that it seemed like a good idea to King Orsino to put up the rest.

The thing flies – it's been flying regularly between Illyria and Paris and on to New York. I just wish it wasn't flying right now when there have been death threats against his majesty's life. The truth is he wants to take that opera singer back to Paris. He doesn't care about anything else. He thinks a few days in the sky in luxury will be a pleasant change. It will for him – smoking cigars, drinking brandy, eating the food in the restaurant. It will for the passengers, too – they can just relax and wait until they get there – if they can avoid getting in the way of Professor Zadok and Count Zadok, his majesty and myself of course. Which they won't. I'll have to check each passenger and each crew member personally. I can't trust the crew to fly the thing, but I can't risk any of them being assassins. I'll probably spend the voyage checking the water in the vases of flowers for poison, and trying to keep his majesty and the songbird away from the Zadoks before they persuade him to do something ridiculous.

It always looked like a turbulent voyage, but if I'd known even half of what was going to happen I'd have stayed safely on the ground.

The Pride of Illyria is the most advanced airship in the world, the brainchild of Illyrian inventor Professor Alexi Zadok. While Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin has been building small and unreliable airships at his works in Freidrichshafen, Zadok has been thinking big, and the result is an airship 760 feet (a sixth of a mile) long, with room for 50 passengers and luxurious dining and

The System

Even though we present character descriptions for the people involved with the airship, we don't provide you with any stats. You're supposed to be able to use this encounter with all manner of campaigns, and there's no way we could provide stats for all of them. Just make up the stats for these characters yourself, using the descriptions as a starting point. Same goes for other 'system' details.

dancing facilities. The King of Illyria is hoping to begin a luxury airship service which will span the world, but at the moment there is a limit to where the airship can fly, because there are few places with big enough ground facilities to support such a massive aerial liner. It needs a ground crew of at least 200 to moor it successfully, not to mention a huge hanger to protect it from bad weather.

Flying the airship

The Pride of Illyria cruises at a speed of 80 miles per hour, and can fly for several days without needing to refuel. It generally flies at around 3,000 feet above sea level. It can go as high as about 5,000 feet, but any higher and the airship begins to run into trouble with the decreasing air pressure causing the hydrogen to expand, straining the gas-bags. This means the ship is unable to fly 'above the weather', and must avoid heavy storms which could tear it apart.

Safety

Hydrogen is a dangerous gas which, in the presence of oxygen and a spark, explodes spectacularly. Consequently, the use of naked flames on the airship is prohibited, except in the heavily flame-proofed smoking room. The crew all wear rubber-soled shoes, and no passengers are allowed out of the passenger decks without them on.

Walkways

The body of the airship is made from aluminium struts, covered with rubberised canvas. Inside this rigid frame are the 16 huge gas-bags, filled with inflammable hydrogen, which keep the airship afloat. Inside this framework are a number of walkways and ladders for the crew (which are normally out of bounds for passengers). These are as follows:

The Keel Catwalk: This joins the main inhabited areas of the ship, running along the base of the hull, and joining the crew quarters near the rear of the ship with the passenger decks, the control car and the officer's quarters at the front. A staircase leads up to the mooring cone at the front of the airship, where there are hatches in the hull to allow ropes to be lowered from the bow of the ship. Ladders also lead up to the four engine cars, and another leads down into the dorsal fin at the rear of the airship, where the auxiliary control room is situated.

Axial Corridor: This runs through the middle of the airship from bow to stern, between the huge gas-bags, which ripple and sigh as the ship sails through the air. Needless to say, no naked flames or anything which might cause a spark is allowed here, in case of hydrogen leaks in the gas-bags.

Air and Climbing Shafts: These are ventilation shafts which also include ladders for getting from the keel catwalk to the axial corridor and on to the top of the hull.

Top of the Hull: A number of hatches lead on to the top of the hull, which is wide and sturdy enough to walk on if you're a brave soul. Crew members are known to come up here to eat their lunch and admire the view, strolling casually back and forth and stepping over each other. Those not used to it tend to prefer to stay on their hands and knees if they dare leave the hatch at all. Sometimes crew members are lowered down the side of the airship on ropes, to mend tears in the fabric.

Inhabited areas

Along the keel of the ship are a number of inhabited areas, as follows (in order, from front to rear):

Officer's Quarters: Sleeping quarters for the ship's ten officers. They are similar to the passenger cabins (see page 40).

Freight Room: This room is where the passengers' luggage is stored, together with any small (and light) cargo which needs to be carried.

Control Car: This part of the ship is outside the main hull, for better all-round visibility. At the front is the control room, where the two main control wheels are situated. The rudder wheel controls the turning of the airship, and the elevator wheel controls the vertical tilt of the airship, for climbing and falling. (Incidentally, it has been discovered that a tilt of ten degrees is enough to tip over a bottle of wine in the restaurant, so the crew have orders not to exceed an angle of five degrees except in emergencies.) Also in the control room is the ballast board, which controls the dropping of the water ballast to make the airship lighter, and the gas board, which controls the many valves to vent hydrogen from the airship to make it heavier. Behind the control room is the navigation room, where the maps and charts needed to fly the ship to its destination are kept. Here is also the telephone switchboard, which controls the internal phone system used for communication between the different areas of the ship. Behind this is a small utility area, which contains the ladder leading up to the keel corridor.

Mail Room and Radio Room: These are on either side of the keel corridor, just above the control car. It is hoped that one day the airship will be used for carrying mail across the Atlantic, but at the moment it contains nothing but empty mail-sorting pigeonholes

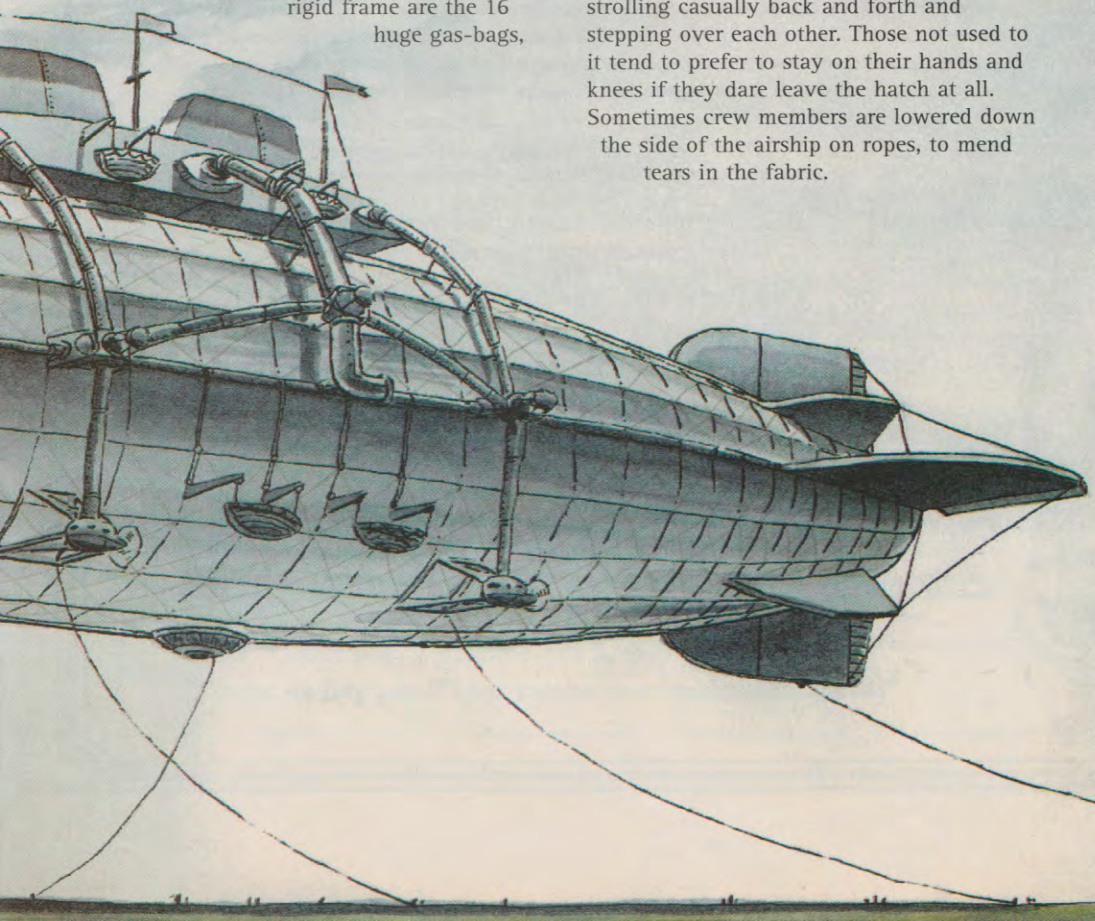

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illustration © arcane by Simon Gurr

and storage space. The radio room contains a powerful radio for talking to the ground, which is manned at all times.

Passenger Decks: These are described in more detail below.

Engine Cars: There are four of these, two on each side of the ship. They project from the side of the ship on struts and contain massive diesel engines which drive the propellers. There is always an engineer in each of these, despite the terrible noise and stifling heat, checking such important things as engine revolutions, water and oil temperature, and oil pressure.

Crew Quarters: A number of bunkrooms for the 40-man strong crew, plus washroom and toilet facilities.

Auxiliary Control Room: In the dorsal fin of the airship, this is a smaller version of the control room in the control car, with dual controls. It is only used in emergencies.

The Passenger Decks

All furniture and fittings in the passenger decks, while luxurious-looking, are made of aluminium for lightness. Every pound of weight in an airship must be taken into account; an airship which is too heavy is sluggish and difficult to manoeuvre.

UPPER PASSENGER DECK

Passenger Cabins: These each contain two bunk-beds and a sink. They are comfortable but rather cramped, about the same size as a sleeping compartment on a train.

Lounge: This is the main area for relaxation on the ship, where the passengers can be entertained by music from the (aluminium!) grand piano. Running along the side of the lounge is a long row of sloping windows, which allow passengers to look down on the landscape passing beneath them. Of course, these windows can not in any circumstances be opened!

Restaurant: There is room in the restaurant for about half the passengers to be fed at one sitting. The food is excellent. It is served from the serving pantry by polite and considerate waiters. There are windows here like those in the lounge.

The Serving Pantry: This contains plates, glasses, cutlery and so on, as well as a selection of fine wines. Food is cooked in the kitchen on the lower passenger deck and brought to the kitchen by dumb waiter. (The dumb waiter is just big enough to fit an average-sized person, curled small.)

LOWER PASSENGER DECK

This deck is divided into two sections, one side for passengers, the other for crew. The two are not accessible to each other except via the keel corridor, which is usually out of bounds to passengers.

Toilets and Urinals: These are the facilities for the passengers.

Bar: A well-stocked bar, with a fine view of the landscape below.

Smoking Room: This heavily fire-proofed room is where those who like a pipe or a cigarette can go without fear of exploding the airship. It was added at the particular request of the king, who is a great cigar lover. This too has an extremely fine view of the ground.

Wash-rooms and Showers: These are for the passengers, and have no direct connection with the crew's quarters.

Crew's Mess: A lounge for off-duty crew. It is less luxurious than the passenger quarters, but still very comfortable.

King Orsino of Illyria

A middle-aged king of a tiny Balkan country, King Orsino is dark haired and slightly plump. He likes to think of himself as daring and romantic, and consequently occasionally makes grand gestures that go wrong. Wearing a sword-stick and carrying a pistol, he knows how to use both weapons and is susceptible to charm and wiles, especially appeals to his protection or to his intelligence. Orsino is not clever. He has invested a lot of money in the airship and is hoping to recover it by developing a regular passenger service across the Atlantic. On everyday occasions, such as the voyage, he wears ordinary Edwardian suits, tailored in Paris, and the smallest and most tasteful of the Illyrian crowns. Educated in Britain, but thinking of himself as a European monarch, Orsino speaks fluent Illyrian, French, English and German. He is married to a minor Austrian princess and has two small sons, but is presently in love with the Brazilian opera singer Maria Delgado. This has caused some scandal at the Illyrian court and may have precipitated the recent death threats against the king.

Quotes: "You should spend more time in the mountains of Illyria, the air would do you good."

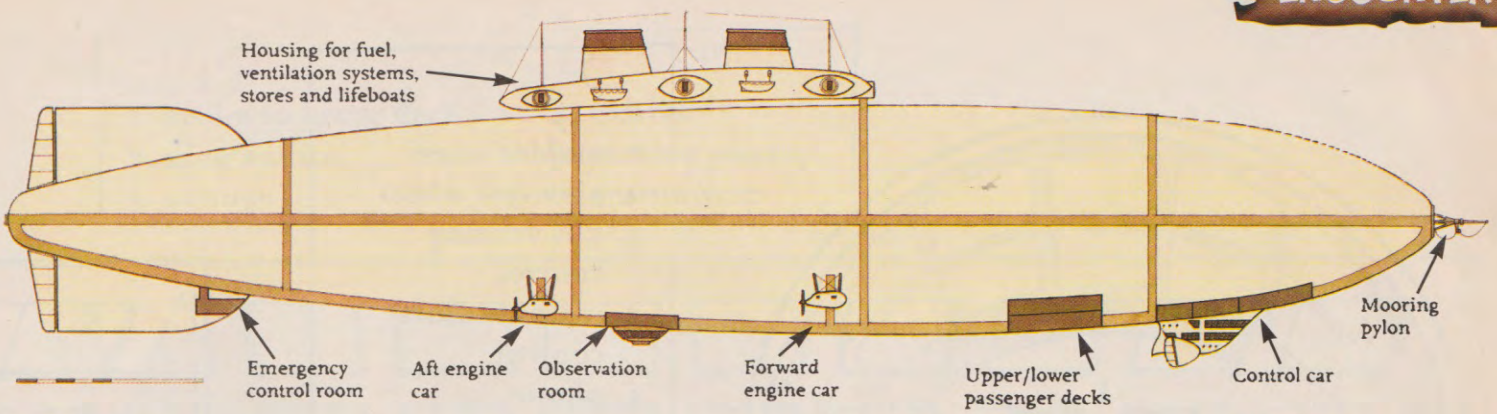
"Would you care for another cigar?"

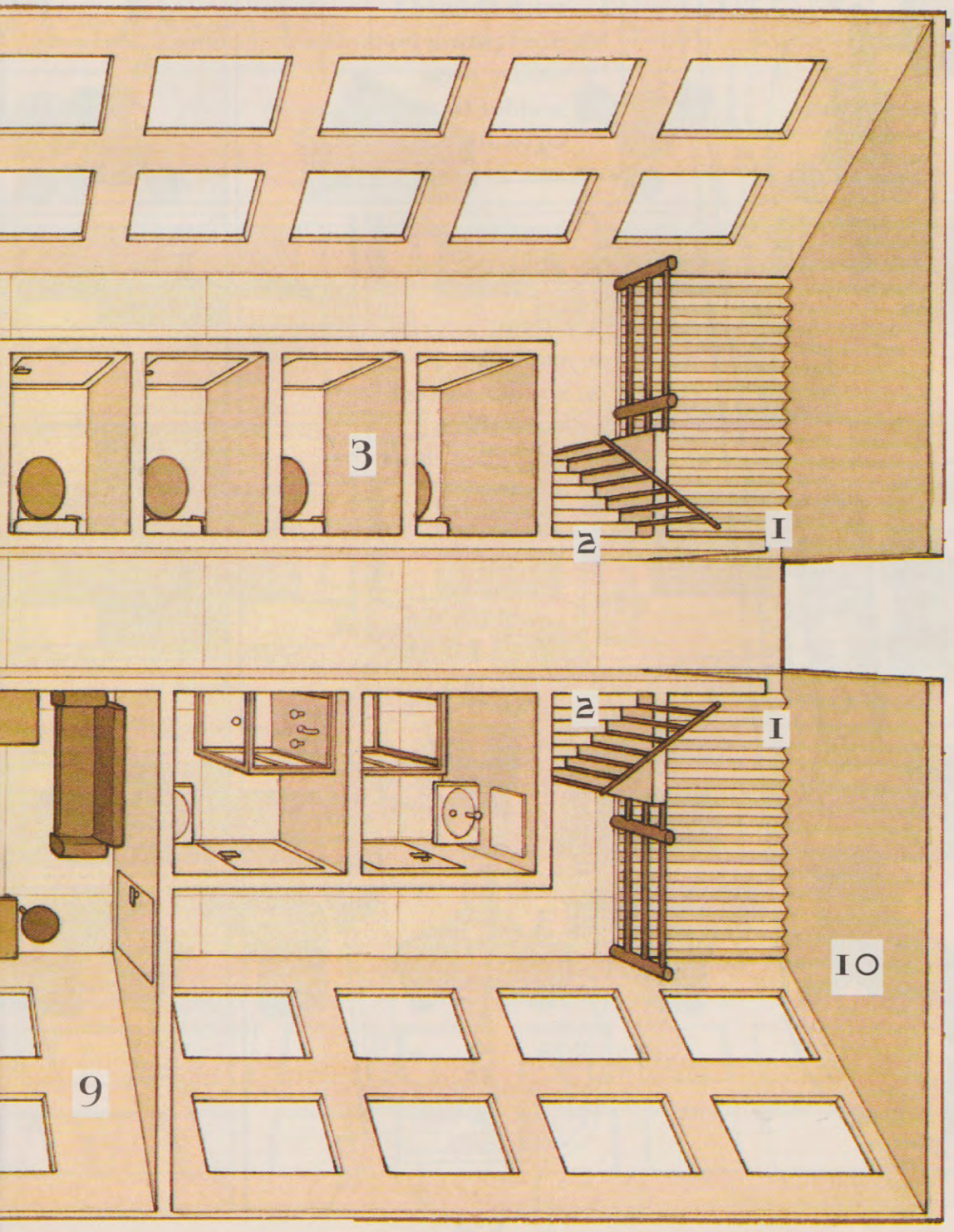
Maria Delgado

Maria is a Brazilian opera singer. She is a typical size and shape for a soprano, short and stout. Her hair is very long, black and lustrous, and she has a heart-shaped face. With an amazing singing voice which can reach ranges only dreamed of by most sopranos, Maria is much in demand in Europe and America. She is the mistress of King Orsino and also a spy for the Brazilian government, which wants to know as many of the technical details of airship construction as possible. She has insisted that they travel on The Pride of Illyria, and hopes to learn more of airship operation and design from Zadok during the voyage. Pretending to be more stupid than she is, Maria carries a small handgun in her lamé shoulder bag, along with a cigarette holder and her cigarettes. She speaks Portuguese, French, German and Italian.

Quotes: "I can reach A above Middle C, you know."

"Let's go somewhere more private and I'll sing you an aria."





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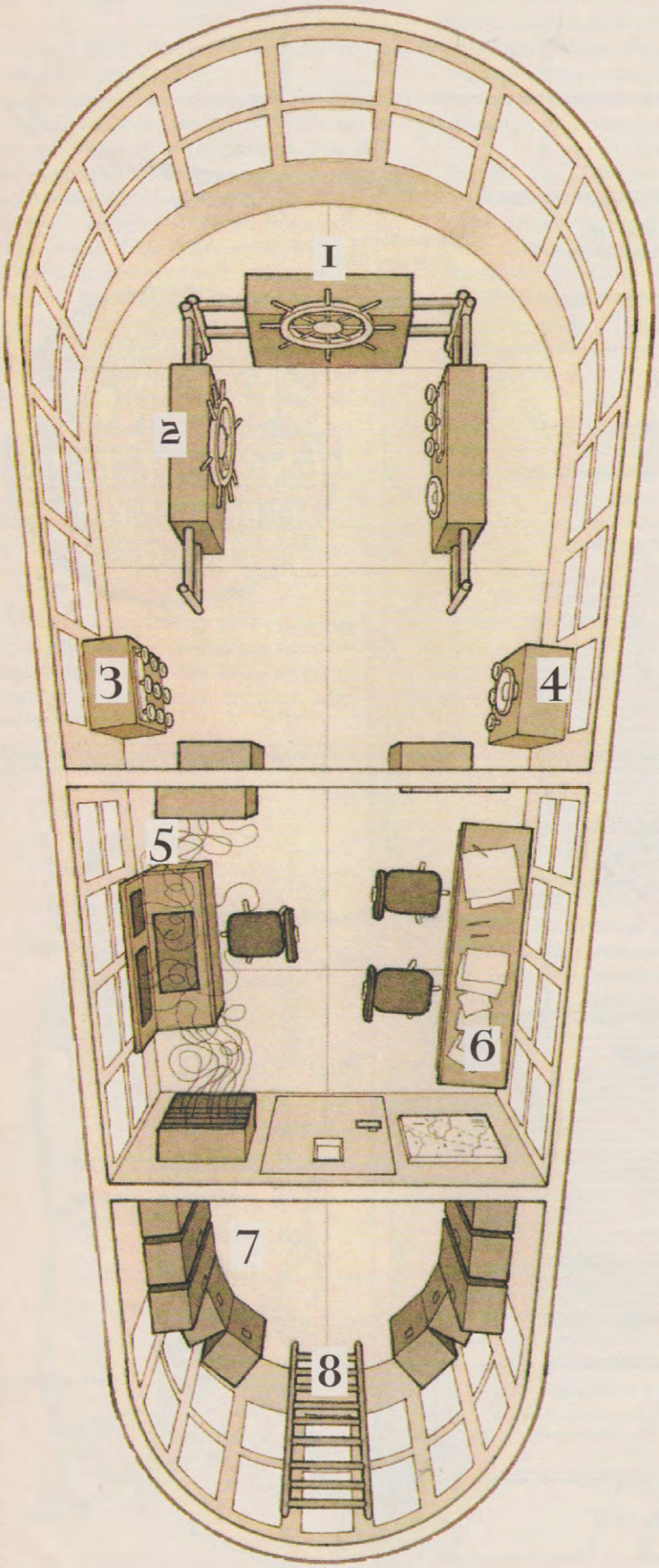
LOWER PASSENGER DECK

1. gangway stairs (lower to ground)
2. stairs to upper deck
3. toilets
4. urinals
5. bar
6. smoking room
7. officers' mess
8. kitchen
9. crew's mess
10. washroms/ showers



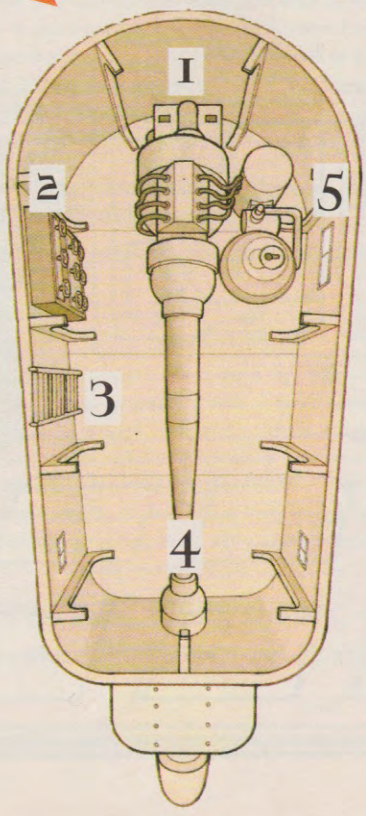
control car

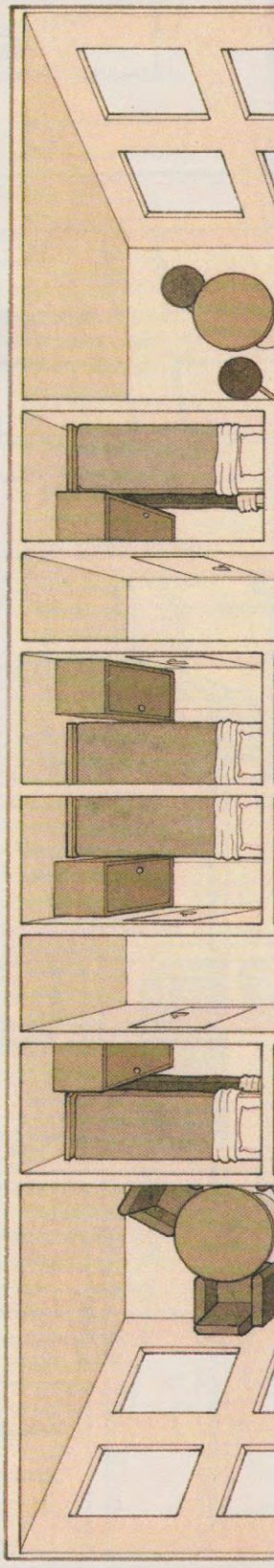
1. Rudder wheel
2. Elevator wheel
3. Gas venting control
4. Water ballast control
5. Phone switchboard
6. Navigation post
7. Utility area
8. Ladder to keel catwalk

ENGINE CAR

1. Engine
2. Controls
3. Ladder to keel catwalk
4. Propeller shaft
5. Window

HULL





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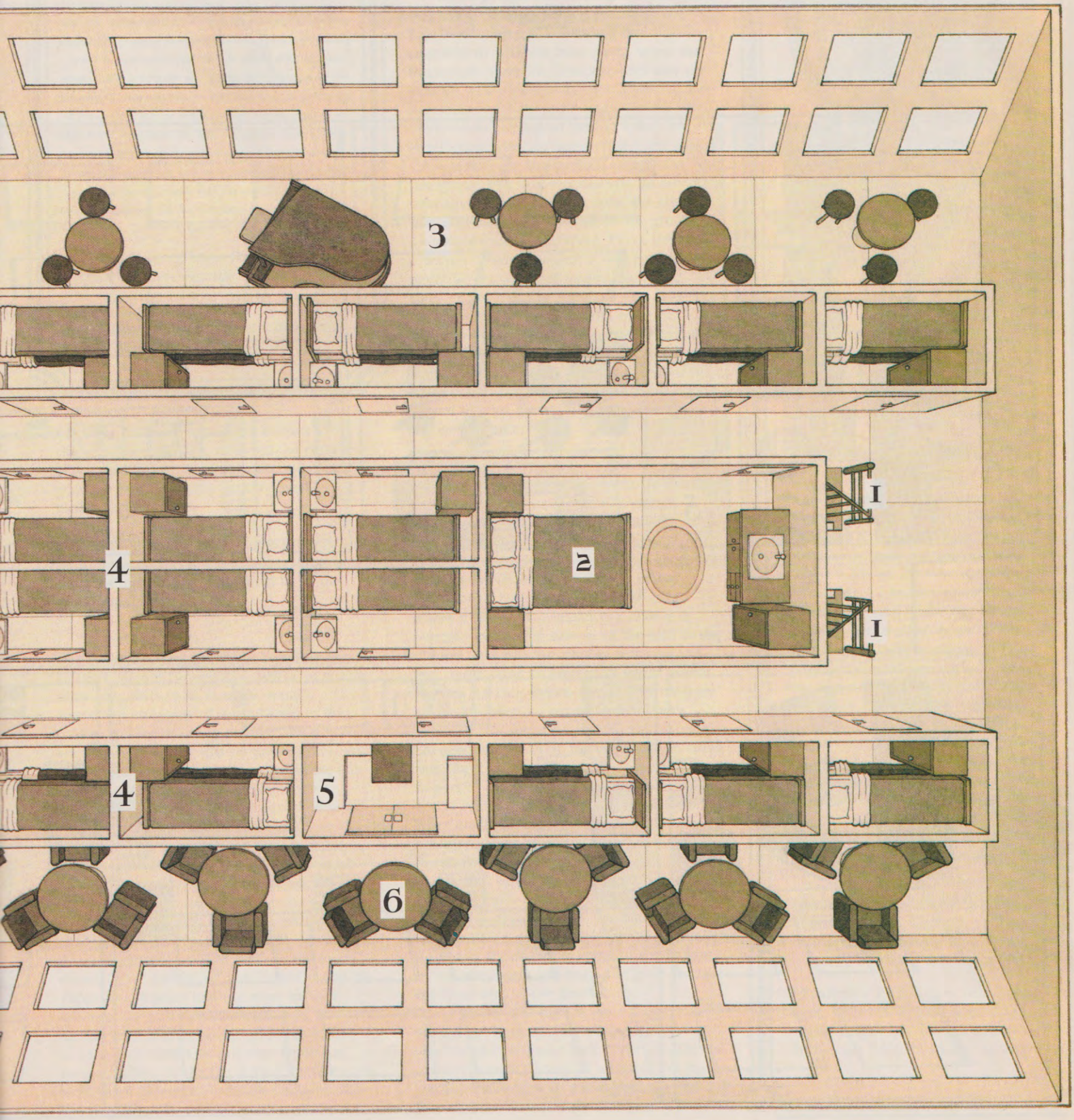
Upper Passenger Deck

1. Stairs to lower deck
2. King's suite
3. Lounge
4. Cabins
5. Serving pantry
6. Restaurant



The Pride of Illyria

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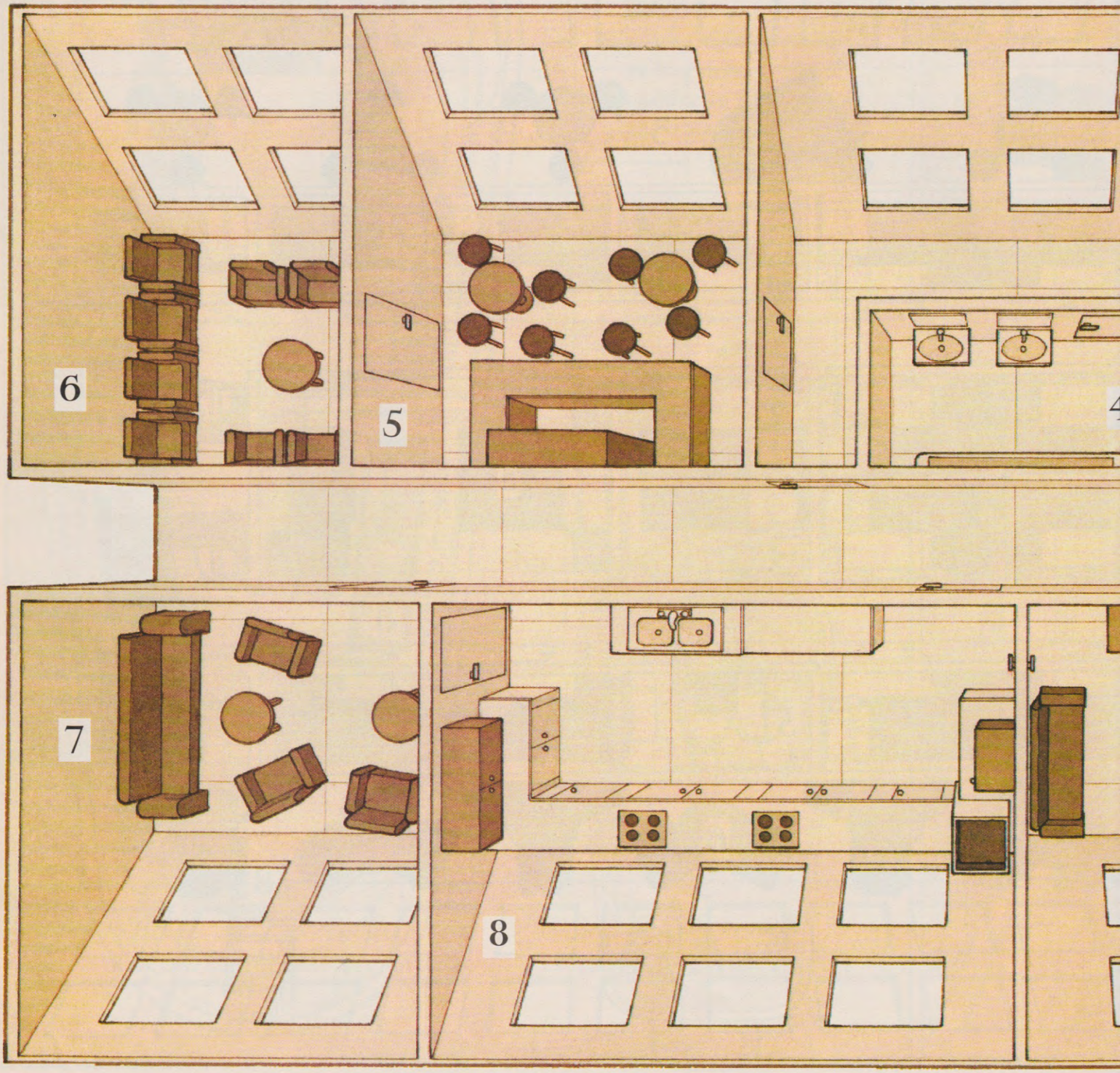


Captain Malvolio

Malvolio is the captain of The Pride of Illyria. An Illyrian engineer, he is young, enthusiastic and believes that airships will be the major means of transport of the future. Always looking handsome and tidy, he wears a smart Illyrian army uniform and always salutes briskly. Captain Malvolio spends much of his time circulating with the passengers and reassuring everyone that the airship is extremely safe, especially any nervous young ladies he comes across. He will kindly offer to take anyone who is friendly and interested on a tour of the gas-bags if they want to go, and even out on to the top of the airship, but he will, however, be reluctant to let them into the control car. This is because he is afraid of his chief engineer, Sayeed. Captain Malvolio is also afraid of King Orsino and of Professor Zadok, both of whom he fears outrank him. He much prefers quiet voyages where he can feel respected by passengers and crew alike.

Quotes: "I have been flying since the Pride's maiden voyage. I was the first Illyrian commoner to fly."

"Would you be interested in seeing how big she really is?"

Kitchen: This well-appointed kitchen uses electricity for cooking, to avoid the danger of a naked flame. A dumb waiter connects it with the serving pantry on the upper passenger deck.

Officers' Mess: The room where the officers go to relax is almost as well-appointed as the passenger lounge (though it lacks the grand piano).

Historical Notes

The Pride of Illyria is closely based on the German airship Hindenburg, which in reality didn't fly until 1936. It made many successful crossings of the Atlantic in the 1930s, and led many to believe that a new era of airship travel was on its way. The ship was designed to use the non-flammable gas helium, but the United States was the only country with enough helium available to fill an airship, and it refused to supply it to the Nazis. Helium is found with certain natural gas deposits. Anyone wishing to run alternate historical games where helium is plentiful needs to locate new sources of natural gas or a new method of extraction.

The first airship flew in 1901. Various people built and crashed them in the next decade. Graf Ferdinand Von Zeppelin and his Zeppelin company had the most success building them. By 1911 he had built an airship with a cabin as luxurious as a first-class railway carriage, and was beginning special flights. In the Great War the Germans used small Zeppelins to bomb England. After the war some German reparations to the US were paid in airships. Airship industries grew up in England and the US, as well as in Germany. But there were a lot of structural problems and difficulties with bad weather conditions, and these heavier-than-air planes was beginning to become obsolete by the time of the Hindenburg disaster.

Although the Hindenburg and its sister ship the Graf Zeppelin were built by the Zeppelin Company, which had no connections with the Nazi party, when the Nazis took power in Germany they saw the airships as a propaganda tool, showing the superiority of Nazi technology. On 6th May, 1937, while circling to land at Lakehurst, New Jersey, after an uneventful flight across the Atlantic, the Hindenburg caught fire. The fire spread in a few seconds and 34 seconds after the initial flame was seen, the whole ship was a burning inferno on the ground – 34 people died, 62 survived. There were rumours of sabotage, but it will probably never be known what caused the initial spark. After this, the Germans also ceased to bother with airships. In 1940, the Hindenburg's successor, the Graf Zeppelin II, was scrapped after a few test flights, the massive airship hangars at Freidrichshafen demolished, and the Zeppelin Airship Works turned into an aluminium pan factory. It was the end on an era.

Why Airships?

Airships make great locations for RPGs. They can provide spectacular special effects, as well as being an interesting setting for everything from whodunnits to action games. Outside the passenger area, there are dangerous catwalks and ladders where villains and heroes can stalk each other, where a slip from a ladder can lead to a plunge through the canvas of the hull to the ground, and where a firearm hitting a gas-bag could cause an explosion which would destroy the ship. When things go wrong on an airship, they go wrong in a big way.

Take, for instance, the US Navy airship Shenandoah. In 1925, the huge helium-filled ship (built by the German Zeppelin Company, as part of the country's reparations after World War I) was caught in a windstorm. After much tossing, it rose above its safe pressure height, was caught in a heavy squall and split into three. The control car plummeted to Earth. The rear section floated gently to Earth with 22 people on board. The front third of the airship, suddenly lighter, rose to 10,000 feet, with seven crew members on board. By careful venting of the helium in the remaining gas-bags, the crew brought the front end to the ground.

Referees looking for more inspiration should get hold of *Hindenburg: An Illustrated History* by Rick Archbold. This is a good general history of airships, not just the Hindenburg, with photographs, plans and illustrations to amaze your players.

Sayeed Singh

The chief engineer of The Pride of Illyria. Like most engineers Sayeed is a Scot, from the Clyde. His father was an engineer who left Bombay to train in Scotland, where Sayeed was born. Now in his fifties, Sayeed has grey hair and brown skin, and a most unusual accent – a bizarre mixture of lilting British Indian and the typical Scottish engineer's brogue. Sayeed is a good engineer. He even gets on well with Professor Zadok, mostly because he can understand what he's talking about most of the time. He came to Illyria with the Professor to work on The Pride of Illyria, and has much experience with ships and with German airships at Freidrichshafen. Sayeed could, if it was absolutely necessary, fly the ship with only unskilled help. He is the most essential man on the ship and considers Captain Malvolio a complete and utter waste of space. Although he spends almost all of his time in the control car, sleeping there in the utility area, he goes elsewhere as needed. He certainly works very hard indeed.

Quotes: "I couldna be the captain because I'm not Illyrian, ye ken, but I dinna see why they had to put yon waste of space aboard at all."

"Professor Zadok is a verra clever man, he's not appreciated as much as he might be. They'll remember him with Edison, in my opinion."

Sir Andrew Cutler

Sir Andrew is the chief of security for Illyria, and was formerly a member of the Burma police. When he retired he took up this job because he wanted to be somewhere warm but not too demanding, but the job has proved more demanding than he hoped. Sir Andrew is intelligent and thorough, not to say slightly paranoid. He takes his work very seriously indeed. King Orsino thinks he is sometimes too serious – especially when he tries to put a stop to something that is going to be fun. Sir Andrew has iron grey hair and a severe face. He carries a gun in his inside jacket pocket and speaks 15 languages fluently – all the major European languages and some Burmese dialects as well.

Quotes: "So what brought you to Illyria? Why are you leaving on this airship? Are you getting off at Paris or going all the way to New York? Don't feel you have to answer these questions, but if you don't want to I can have you arrested."

"This job is exhausting and unrewarding. Always more assassins, more lunatic disruptions, nothing ever runs smoothly."

Scenario: Duel at 5,000 feet

Getting Involved

The PCs should have some reason to be travelling between Illyria and Paris, or New York. They should find it easy to book seats aboard The Pride of Illyria as long as they have plenty of money. If they have no such reason, have a wealthy patron ask them to travel to Paris to collect something and then bring it back, and pay for the trip. The scenario assumes that they are passengers aboard the airship, and that they have not previously been involved with any of the non-player characters.

Unknown to anyone else, Count Boris and Maria Delgado have come to an arrangement. The Count wants to assassinate the king, and the opera singer has orders to try to sabotage the airship to ruin Zadok's reputation. They are working together. The Count has a number of his henchmen in the crew – a mysterious outbreak of 'food poisoning' in the crew's mess the day before the flight meant some of them needed replacing. These henchmen are loyal to the Count, but he considers them expendable.

Meeting Cutler

Describe the airship as the PCs come aboard. The PCs meet some of the guests and the NPCs in the lounge, bar or smoking room. They can meet the king in the smoking room. They will definitely encounter Cutler as he makes his way around investigating the passengers. Unless they behave like obvious spies or villains, and especially if they are British, Cutler will tell them of his suspicions about the crew.

Murder!

During the first night of the trip, Cutler is murdered by one of the crew loyal to the Count and the PCs will probably be roped in to investigate. This can be done in several ways. Cutler could send them a note asking them to meet him, and then they discover his body. Or the king could conscript them as trustworthy investigators because Cutler has cleared them in his notes. Or they could just elect themselves in charge of the affair – they're hardly likely to ignore the events, after all. Cutler is killed in his cabin with a sharp kitchen knife.

Seduction

One of the PCs (preferably one with duelling skills) is seduced by Maria Delgado. She intends to be found in a compromising position with the PC at a time when she is due to meet the king in a secluded part of the airship (the mail room?). If seduction looks like it's not going to work, she will pick one who knows something about airships and talk to him about them until the time comes for her to meet the king, when she will leap on the PC and begin kissing him passionately. Alternatively, she may claim to have found evidence of who the murderer is, and insist on taking one of the PCs off on his own to show him. Whatever her reason for getting the PC alone, he will be found in a compromising position by King Orsino, who will immediately challenge him to a duel.

Duel

The king insists that the duel must take place. If the PC refuses, he will insist that the PC is arrested and taken into custody (the airship is classed as Illyrian territory, at least as far as the king's concerned and, after all, he makes the laws). The PC may be able to persuade the king to fight to first blood rather than death. The only possible weapon for this duel is (naturally) duelling sabres or foils, because firearms are, of course, too dangerous on board the ship. The king claims that the ceilings are far too low in the passenger decks and that an open space is needed for a decent duel. He decides that the duel must take place on top of the airship, and simply won't take no for an answer.

There's a good view from the top of the airship, that is if you can bear to look. Ahead of the ship, the Alps can be seen drifting by below. The air is cold and clear, with a strong wind (the airship is presently cruising at 50 mph). The king thinks this wind is a bit stiff for a decent duel, and suggests that the airship should be slowed. The Count volunteers to go and tell the Captain. Shortly afterwards, there is a change in the engine note and the wind lessens. The duel can begin.

Few people have come to watch the duel – not surprisingly, they don't want to be on top of the airship – but the passengers are clustered together in the lounge, waiting for news of the result. Maria Delgado is nowhere to be seen. The top of the airship is actually fairly wide, and as long as you don't slip you should be okay. But emphasise to the PCs the slippery nature of the canvas underfoot, and the way the ship curves off to the left and right of them. They could insist on being anchored by a rope, but this might well hamper their duelling skills. Let the PC and the king fight for a few rounds, but if it looks like one party or other is in danger of being seriously wounded, go to the next part of the adventure.

Sabotage

While the duel is going on, the Count has taken over the engine room, killed any crew (including Malvolio) in there loyal to the king, and set the controls to crash the ship into the mountains. Having put the controls in this position, he has destroyed the control wheels to prevent anyone using them. On top of that, Sayeed, the engineer, has been tied to a chair in the control cabin, with a large bomb on his lap. If he moves it will go off. Having done that, the Count and Maria have escaped by parachute, leaving their hapless henchmen with orders not to let anyone reach the auxiliary control room.

The first the PCs know of this is when the ship suddenly tips downwards at the nose. Any PCs standing up will begin sliding or stumbling toward the front of the ship. There are eye-bolts and guide ropes on top of the ship, so they ought to be able to grab something before they slide off the end of the ship, but it won't be much fun. Inside, various objects (bottles of wine, vases of flowers, packs of cards and so on) slide off tables, people fall over and the passengers start to panic.

When the PCs on the top try to get inside, they find crew members with crowbars blocking their way. The PCs (and the king, and Zadok, who will join with the PCs when it seems the beloved airship is at stake) must either fight these burly henchmen, or persuade them that their own best interests are served by letting the PCs back in again.

Regaining Control

The PCs will probably go to the control car to see what's going on. It's obvious that the bomb on Sayeed's lap cannot be defused easily. He suggests (if the PCs don't think of it first) that they go to the auxiliary control room and fly the ship from there, and he will talk them through it, using the internal phone system.

Getting to the auxiliary control room will not be easy, because the main access routes are all guarded by the Count's men. The PCs may either fight them or talk them into giving up, but it won't be easy. It's probably best if the PCs split up, each taking a different route through the maze of catwalks and airshafts. Build up the tension – is there someone at the bottom of this ladder? Is there someone waiting in the darkness beyond the open mail room door? Maybe one of the henchmen has a gun and no sense, and begins firing at one of the PCs. Naturally, he'll miss the gas-bags, but the PCs will be severely worried, and keen to disarm him as soon as possible. A great place for a fight is the nose of the ship, where a hand-to-hand struggle can be had against a hatch which may pop open at any moment revealing a frightening and expansive panorama of mountain peaks getting closer by the second...

Eventually, they'll capture the control room, and get the ship back under control, under Sayeed's guidance. If you want to be really evil, have one or more of the engine cars under the control of the Count's men. When the PC says, "Rear starboard engine full astern," they hear a hostile voice say, "No," and realise that they've got to capture the engine cars too. And, of course, throughout all this the ship is plummeting toward the mountains.

There are three ways of dealing with the end. These are as follows:

THE AIRSHIP IS SAVED

The PCs manage to pull the airship out of its dive just before it scrapes the peaks and save it. Of course, there's still a bomb on board which has to be defused. One possible way to get rid of this bomb is to cut a hole in the deck around Sayeed's chair and let him fall through. This isn't very fair for Sayeed, but sometimes the needs of the many... Zadok may be able to work out a way of defusing it, if he is not being rushed. "Yes, I can do it, but it will be dangerous and it will take some time!"

THE AIRSHIP IS MOSTLY SAVED

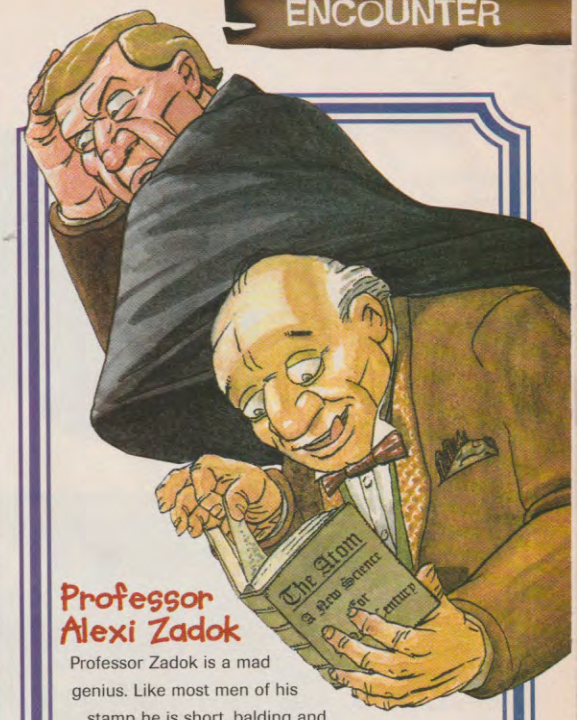
The PCs manage to pull the ship out of its dive, but it scrapes the peak. The control car is torn loose from the ship, and the ship, suddenly much lighter, rises rapidly, escaping the blast from the bomb. The PCs are still on the airship, but don't have any advice on how to fly it. Can they figure out enough to get them out of the mountains to a safe landing?

THE AIRSHIP IS WRECKED

The PCs get to the auxiliary control cabin, but not in time to pull the ship out of its dive. The front of the ship hits a mountain peak and the bomb explodes, igniting the hydrogen in the front gas-bags and sending a massive ball of flames heading toward the back of he ship. Any PCs in the rear of the ship stand some chance; if they manage to jump out of one of the windows or hatches, they might land on a snowy mountain slope and roll to safety, away from the burning wreckage. Then all they have to do is escort the King of Illyria safely through the high snowy mountains back to civilization without any cold weather survival gear.

Next month

In issue 19's encounter we go for a meal at a Chinese restaurant and find that there's more on the menu than initially meets the eye. **arcane** 19 is out on Friday 25th April.



Professor Alexi Zadok

Professor Zadok is a mad genius. Like most men of his stamp he is short, balding and stooped. His eyes bulge and he talks in bursts of enthusiasm. He lives only for his inventions, many of which are spectacular failures. Zadok studied at the Sorbonne and spent some time working with the Graf Zeppelin in Freidrichshafen in Germany, but came back to his native country to put some of his ideas into effect. Unlike others of his kind, however, he is a kind-hearted man who loves animals and children, and is patriotic towards his homeland of Illyria. His real problem is not his extreme and occasionally terrifying enthusiasm, but the fact that he is 20 or 30 years ahead of his time. A lot of what he wants to do is right, but the technical base is not yet there for it. Alexi does tend to get caught up in his enthusiasms and assumes all his listeners understand the technical details.

Quotes: "You waste too much energy on sexual matters, my dear Orsino. I have six children and I have wasted little time in dalliance with my wife."

"For my next invention, I am trying to find a way of splitting the atom."

Count Boris Zadok

Alexi Zadok's older brother, Count Boris is tall and often wears a long black cloak with a red lining. He is bald, but disguises this fact with an elaborate wig. He has chiselled features which he spoils with his habitual sneer, and his temper is always on a short leash. Boris finds his brother annoying and frequently snaps at him. He has designs on the kingdom of Illyria, and hopes to be made regent if anything unfortunate should happen to King Orsino. He is involved in many complicated plots to help this unfortunate thing happen.

Quotes: "They say my brother got all the brains and I got all the beauty. It's not true. I have brains too."

"It would be such a terrible thing if anything unfortunate should happen to our dear king while his sons are still so small."

DECK ENGINES

YOUR BASIC WHITE WEENIE

LANDS
4 Mishra's Factory
16 Plains
1 Strip mine

CREATURES
4 Savannah Lion
4 White Knight
4 Order of Leitbur
4 Order of the Sacred Torch
4 Wild Aesthir

SPELLS
4 Crusade
4 Swords to Plowshares
2 Disenchant
2 Reinforcements
1 Land Tax
1 Balance
3 Armageddon

ARTIFACTS
1 Black Vise
1 Zuran Orb
4 Aeolipile

SIDEBOARD
1 Armageddon
2 Disenchant
3 CoP: Red
2 CoP: Green
2 Karma
3 Serrated Arrows
2 Eye for an Eye

PART 1: THE WEENIE DECK

There may be an infinite number of Magic decks, but most fall into one of half a dozen or so different types. In the first of a new series, Jason Nicoll *examines deck construction.*

The removal of Ice Age, Fallen Empires and the restricted list from Type II Tournament play in January 1997 was the biggest overhaul of the Type II environment in its two-year existence. It was so significant an event that it signalled the demise of the dominant decks (Erhnageddon, Necro and Turbo Stasis) of 1996 and meant a complete change to the whole dynamics of the T2 tournament scene.

Players were simply going to have to go back to the drawing board and start the whole deck generation process again, from the deck's genesis to play-testing and continued honing.

Of course, there are easy ways and hard ways of doing that. This series of articles is about one of the easier ways; by using the Classic Deck Engines that have been around since the beginning of *Magic*. They are listed below:

Weenie • Heavy Hitter • Direct Damage • Discard • Land Destruction • Counter Control • Deck Depletion

Each issue we will explore the facets and strategies of one of the Classic Deck Engines, staring with the Weenie.

How it works

The Weenie Deck Engine is based on the premise of overwhelming your opponent through quick, cheap creatures before their deck can develop. Most games don't last long because the Weenie deck generally wins convincingly in the first half a dozen turns or gets toasted shortly afterwards.

It has a lower mana ratio than most decks and is very simple to play. Most Weenie decks are either mono-coloured or have a splash of a second colour. They are mainly made up of low-casting-cost creatures. However, they often have cards that boost the Strength & Toughness of the Weenies (Crusade, Bad Moon and so on) and delay cards (Armageddon or Winter Orb) to keep the opponent from weathering the initial storm.

White Weenie (see sidebar, left) is the most common Weenie deck and will be used as our example. It's an example of a typical, no thrills, basic White Weenie deck prior to the 1997 restriction. As you can see, it is very simple, thorough and honest, but is by no means an advanced deck. It would probably have done reasonably well in an average tournament but would have been toast if it made it through to the knock-out stages. However, a White Weenie deck can be a tournament-winning deck if tweaked and focused to deal with the surrounding play environment.

Deck construction

To create a post-1997 Type II White Weenie deck we must examine the available creatures as well as any themes that may enhance its strengths while reducing its weaknesses. Its main strengths are in its speed and ability to spread the damage investment over many critters. Its main weakness is that it becomes vulnerable as play continues and rarely survives into the mid and late game. Mass creature destruction such as Earthquake could also upset it, as could an early Gloom.

So to help improve its staying power in the mid and late game we could increase the amount of control in the deck. The problem is that without Icy and Blinky, the control variant (see panel on the right) has become less effective. We could always choose another colour as a theme to help bolster the deck. However, because many of the best Weenie creatures have a Double Plains casting cost, the second colour will have to be a minor addition to avoid mana distribution issues. The deck should also have low casting cost cards so as to avoid any conflict with the delay cards that will be added later.

Blue has often been added to a White Weenie deck to counter the dreaded Black hoser cards (Gloom and Dystopia). The problem is that the addition of Sleight of Mind or Mind Bend to a White Weenie deck has diminished that theme's effectiveness greatly since the removal of the Sleightable Knights.

Black has many small, cheap creatures with exotic abilities too, making it another popular choice for the Weenie Engine. Unfortunately, Black typically demands a large amount of commitment before you can gain a significant advantage from it, which makes it unsuitable in this situation.

Green has Giant Growth, Elvish Archer and the mighty Erhnam Djinn (arguably the biggest weenie creature in the game). However, if we go down the Green route we might end up stumbling into Erhnageddon territory. Red has lots of cheap direct damage that can give new roads to victory without conflicting with any delay card added later. Besides, because there are no

Disintegrate
Sorcery
Disintegrate deals X damage to target creature or player. That creature cannot regenerate until end of turn. If the creature is dealt lethal damage this turn, remove it from the game.
White Knight
Summon Knight
Protection from black, first strike
Out of the blackness and stench of the engulfing swamp emerged a shimmering figure. Only the splattered armor and ichor-stained sword hinted at the unfathomable evil the Knight had just laid waste.
Armageddon
Destroy all lands.

ENGINES

A CONTROL VARIATION

With the restriction of Strip Mine in September 1996, many lands became viable for tournament play. The Kjeldoran Outpost (aka the dude ranch) was one such land. The fact that you could generate an army of dudes with any spare mana at the end of your opponent's turn, ready to kick butt in the following main phase, was incredible. Once the Outpost had generated a few tokens and had paid for its initial poor card economy (sacrificing a Plains) it became an awesome force. Wrath of (Thank) God allowed the player to reset the table and literally hit the ground running next turn. Obvious additions were the Blinking Spirit and the Icy Manipulator which complemented the WOTG by forcing the opponent to cast more and more critters. It would effectively force an opponent to over-extend the amount of investment in the permanents in play, and thereby lose out in the attrition stakes. This variation was interesting because it was undeniably White Weenie in nature with its cast of 12 knights. However, it could also last into the mid and even late stages of the game through its control cards (Icy, Blinky and WOTG) and ability to reset and start over. I saw versions of this deck win at least four tournaments in the three-month period to the end of 1997. If Blinky makes a reappearance in 5th Edition, I wouldn't be surprised to see a return of this variation of the White Weenie.

THE WEENIE ROAST DECK

LANDS
4 Undiscovered Paradise
4 Mishra's Factory
10 Plains
2 Mountain

CREATURES
4 Savannah Lion
4 White Knight
4 Wild Aesthir
4 Longbow Archer
4 Zhalfirin Crusader

SPELLS
4 Lightning Bolts
4 Incinerates
4 Guerrilla Tactics
4 Swords to Plowshares
2 Disenchant
2 Winter Orb
2 Reinforcements
2 Crusade

THE SIDEBOARD
2 Lodestone Bauble
3 CoP Red
2 CoP Green
2 Disenchant
2 Meekstone
3 Red Elemental Blasts

longer any Pain lands we don't have to worry about losing mana efficiency by siding with a non-aligned colour.

Maximum Damage

The next step is to decide which and how many Weenie creatures to choose. Because we are adding burn to the deck, we have fewer slots available for the Weenies. We are simply looking for the best five creatures that are cheap to cast and can do the most damage in the shortest period of time. Candidates should have a useful combat ability, such as First Strike (and to a lesser degree Flanking) or Banding. Any other creatures with excellent mana-to-power ratios or useful abilities should also be considered.

I've picked out the best five creatures. Not surprisingly, it made more sense to add creatures with First Strike and Flanking over those with Banding because both abilities combined with Burn can be devastating to the health of other creatures. Of the seven legal T2 White Creatures with First Strike listed below, three were good enough to be considered for this deck:

Pike Men	**4th Edition**
Tundra Wolves	**4th Edition**
White Knight	**4th Edition**
Wild Aesthir	**Alliances**
Ekundu Griffin	**Mirage**
Zhalfirin Knight	**Mirage**
Longbow Archer	**Visions**

I have never been that convinced of the value of 1/1 creatures in combat situations, so neither the Tundra Wolves or the Pike Men made it. Although the Zhalfirin Knight has Flanking, which combined with its First Strike ability can be lethal, I felt the Zhalfirin Crusader from Visions has such a useful ability of redirecting damage in addition to its Flanking that it should be chosen instead.

The White Knight is such a versatile chap that he was always going be in the line-up. The Longbow Archer has the useful ability of being able to block Flying creatures,. Finally, the Wild Aesthir's ability to pump for three damage is just too good for it to be left out.

That left room for one of the oldest and best-loved Weenie creatures in the game: the Savannah Lions, with their outstanding power to casting cost ratio. Unfortunately, Kjeldoran Outpost and the mighty Serra Angel could not be included because the deck's theme of limiting mana production makes them too difficult to use.

Amongst the spells are Reinforcements, which should help the recovery from any reset, and Crusade, which boosts the power and toughness of all White Creatures. Armageddon and Winter Orb can complement each other in a deck, but we are going to run tight on the mana ratios, so I think Winter Orb is better, especially combined with Undiscovered Paradise which effectively liberates 2 mana instead of the normal 1 each turn.

Most Weenie decks can operate on as little as 16 land. However, because Red has been added to the deck, I have pushed the total up to 20. If mana production proves to be a problem, consider adding more basic land as opposed to adding Thawing Glaciers which has the tendency to slow a deck down at the start.

Play to Win

A White Weenie player should get two or three creatures down as soon as possible and start attacking, but bear in mind that sometimes it is worth playing attrition tactics and keeping a couple of creatures in reserve in case your opponent plays a reset card, such as the dreaded Wrath of (Thank) God or Earthquake.

The direct damage can be supplemented with the First Strike abilities to take down larger creatures. A White Knight with a well-timed Lightning Bolt can take down an Erhnam and live to fight another day. Later in the game you can target your opponent with direct damage.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

This deck is only a first draft, so don't be afraid to make changes. You may find, for example, that the deck works best with additional direct damage or control cards. You may also find fun variants, like combining the Wildfire Emissary and Serra Angel with Meekstone. Suck it and see!

Visions of Victor

the gaming magazine arcane VISIONS ESSENTIAL TIPS!

Top Magic player **Paul Barclay** *tells us ten of his favourite, and most deadly,* Visions *combos...*

Song of Blood and Goblin Recruiter

A must for any Goblin deck, this combo allows your poor little Goblins to each do at least 5 damage to your opponent on one turn. Cast the Recruiter when you have lots of Goblins already in play, and then choose to put lots of Goblins on top of your library. When you cast the Song of Blood, you will find that the top four cards of your library are creatures, and thus all your attacking creatures will get +4/+0 until the end of the turn. Watch your opponent cringe, just before he is squished by a horde of 5/1 Goblins (and they told me Goblins weren't dangerous).

Elkin Lair and The Rack

This produces a good lock for any red-black discard deck. During each player's upkeep phase, Elkin Lair forces that player to remove a card from her hand and set it aside. She then has the choice of either playing it before the beginning of her next turn, or discarding it. Because both players will be playing one card per turn, your opponent will have great difficulties in increasing the number of cards in her hand. Used with The Rack, which does damage to your opponent for having too few cards in her hand, this combo can result in a lot of damage every turn.

Elkin Lair
Enchant World
The Rack
Artifact
At the end of target opponent's upkeep, The Rack deals that player 1 damage for each card in his or her hand fewer than three.
Invented in Mishra's earlier days, the Rack was once his most feared creation.

Verduran Enchantress
Gossamer Chains
Summon Enchantress
Return Gossamer Chains to owner's hand: Target unblocked creature deals no combat damage this turn.
"Harah swung his sword mightily, but still the air held him fast."
—Azewrath, "Kenechi's Dream"

Gossamer Chains and Verduran Enchantress

Verduran Enchantress enables you to draw a card every time you cast an Enchantment. Gossamer Chains is an Enchantment which allows you to return it to your hand to prevent one unblocked creature dealing damage in combat. Used together, not only can you prevent one of your opponent's creatures dealing damage to you each turn, but you can draw an extra card each turn as well, every time you re-cast the Gossamer Chains. If you're desperate to draw cards, you can even use the Chains on one of your own attacking creatures.

Blanket of Night and Karma

This one hurts. A lot. Once Blanket of Night turns all your opponent's lands into Swamps, play Karma to do him or her an amount of damage every turn equal to the number of land that she controls. Be careful, though, because the Karma will also be hurting you. A Circle of Protection: White might be a good idea to prevent the damage from the Karma.

Crypt Rats and Spirit Link

Use all your Black mana with the Crypt Rats to deal a large amount of damage to everything in play, and gain a huge amount of life from the Spirit Link. Sadly, the poor rats also die. To keep them alive, you could try putting a Black Ward on them, and then you can do this every turn.

Spirit Link
Crypt Rats
Gain 1 life for every 1 damage target creature deals. You may gain more life than the toughness or the total life of the creature or player damaged by the creature Spirit Link enchants.
1/1

Mortal Wound and Rod of Ruin

A way for a mono-green deck to solve its biggest problem: how to kill a really big creature. Put the Mortal Wound on anything you don't particularly like the look of and then deal it one damage with the Rod of Ruin. The Mortal Wound will bury the big creature, ridding you of your problem permanently.

Dream Tides and Prodigal Sorcerer

Prodigal Sorcerers are usually quite a slow way of damaging things because they only deal one damage each time they are tapped. If you use Dream Tides, creatures don't untap as normal, but you can untap the Sorcerer during your Upkeep phase by paying 2 generic mana. You can do this as many times as you have mana for, so you can do a lot of damage with one single Sorcerer during your upkeep.

Prodigal Sorcerer
Dream Tides
Enchantment
Creatures do not untap during their controllers' untap phase.
Each nongreen creature's controller may pay 2 additional ⟳ during his or her upkeep to untap that creature.

Dragon Mask
Artifact
Ball Lightning
Summon Ball Lightning
Trample
Ball Lightning can attack the turn it comes into play. At the end of any turn, bury Ball Lightning.

Dragon Mask and Ball Lightning

Ball Lightning is a great card, but you can't use it more than once because it is buried at the end of each turn. If you use it with Dragon Mask, however, the Ball Lightning will be returned to your hand at the end of the turn. If the Ball Lightning survives until the end of the turn, you can choose to return it to your hand, rather than burying it. The fact that the Dragon Mask gives a creature +2/+2 is considered by some people to be a minor bonus, because it makes the Ball Lightning into an 8/3 creature.

Lightning Cloud and Viashino Sandstalker

The Sandstalker has the disadvantage that it returns to your hand at the end of each turn. This does mean, however, that you have to cast it again each turn, which is perfect for using Lightning Cloud's ability every single turn. This combo is especially good against a weenie deck, where you will be able to kill lots of creatures with the same card. Then, when you've killed all of your opponent's blockers, you can attack with your Sandstalker.

Breathstealer's Crypt and Guiding Spirit

If any player draws a creature card while Breathstealer's Crypt is in play, it forces that player to either pay 3 life or discard that card. Guiding Spirit looks at the top card of a player's graveyard and puts it on top of that player's library if it is a creature card. This will soon become very painful for your opponent, because he will have a choice between not gaining any new cards or paying lots of life. Either way, you have a good chance of winning.

MY DECK

Mark Wright

In the second instalment of our series on Magic decks, Cid talks to tournament winner Mark Wright about his old favourite, a Red/Blue Counter/Burn deck that's evolved over three years.

IT'S LIKE THIS...

LAND
8 Mountains
8 Islands
4 Mishra's Factories
3 Thawing Glaciers
1 Soldevi Excavations

SPELLS
3 Counterspell
2 Dissipate
2 Force of Will
1 Recall
2 Political Trickery
4 Lightning Bolt
2 Kaervek's Torch
2 Disintegrate
1 Pyrokinesis
3 Pillage
2 Control Magic

CREATURES
2 Azure Drake
1 Dwarven Miner
1 Uthden Troll
2 Wildfire Emissaries
2 Earth Elementals

ARTIFACTS
2 Lodestone Bauble
1 Serrated Arrows

SIDEBOARD
2 Tormod's Crypt
1 Feldon's Cane
3 Sleight of Mind
4 Blue Elemental Blast
2 Red Elemental Blast
1 Pillage
2 Earthquake

KEY CARDS
Probably some Red DD such as Lightning Bolt and Disintegrate. Definitely Thawing Glaciers. And Counter Magic (probably Dissipate).

Regular players of tournaments in the Midlands and North will recognise Mark (known locally as OB1) and generally panic if they draw him in the first round. Mark started playing early, around the time that *Antiquities* was released, when he bought five boosters and constructed his first deck. This deck has stayed with him for the last three years, adapting and evolving to match the changing tournament environment.

"When I first built this deck, I had a limited pool of cards, and I opted to make a Red/White/Blue/Green deck. Red, White and Blue were the main colours and I used Green mainly to make up the creatures. As time went by, I swapped out the Green to bring the deck to three colours and improve its performance.

"I decided to go with these three colours mainly because I liked them. Red can deal direct damage and has good creature selection, Blue provides the permission and White gives the deck its defensive capability."

A WINNING DECK

"The deck became Red/Blue Counter/Burn when I entered my first tournament in Burton. The rules required a deck with exactly 60 cards, so I removed the White to construct a much more aggressive deck. Slimming the deck down to 60 cards was probably one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. Anyway, I won that tournament (against Garry Knight) which was a great shock to me!"

This was Mark's first tournament win but it was not to be his last. Using the same deck with a few simple modifications (dictated by which cards are legal in a tournament), Mark has consistently been placed highly in nearly every tournament he has entered.

"The deck has changed with time, partly to match deck construction rules and partly to match the dominant decks. The first change I made was to add the White back in. I was always annoyed that Red could shatter artifacts but for the same cost in White I could destroy both artifacts and enchantments. Also with the added colour I could use Swords to Plowshares and Serra Angels. Obviously I had to add multi-lands to make three colours work and take the Bloodmoon out of the sideboard."

Needless to say, any three-year-old deck has seen some major changes.

"The biggest change that hit this deck was with the release of *Chronicles*. At the time I was using Azure Drake as a cheap 2/4 flyer for 4 mana. However, Ernham Djinn were obviously much better creatures for the same casting cost. This forced me to remove the Blue element in favour of Green. To successfully achieve this I had to use Ice Age Painlands and Cities of Brass, plus more artifact life gainers to prevent me killing myself.

"Now I have come full circle and am back to playing Red/Blue Counter/Burn, using basic land and Mishra's plus Thawing Glaciers to draw mana and improve card quality."

PLAYING COUNTER/BURN

"At the moment land destruction is very important, and Red/Blue has a number of efficient cards. Dwarven Miner, Pillage and Stone Rain are all excellent Red spells and Political Trickery can be devastating under the right circumstances."

Enchantments cause problems for decks with no counter measures against them, and Red/Blue is no exception.

"Circle of Protection: Red will shut down most Red decks. I use Control Magic to steal an opponent's creature and then use that to win.

"The other deck which causes problems for offensive decks is the popular Blue/White Counterpost deck. I can cope with this by simply slowing down my play and waiting for the chance to steal a Kjeldoran Outpost."

Sideboarding, a difficult skill to master, often lets inexperienced players down. Mark's sideboard has an emphasis on enhancement rather than hosing.

"I generally play Tormod's Crypt to combat Hammers and Ivory Gargoyles, Sleights against Circle of Protection, Earthquakes for weenies and untouchables. I also use Feldon's Cane for slow decks and both of the Elemental Blasts for colour hosing."

MOMENTS OF GLORY

"No specific accolades spring to mind. I generally get the most satisfaction when I'm complimented by an opponent after a close game. This deck has won around 12 tournaments, and will usually put me in the top eight, but I think the finest hour had to be when I came 3rd in the Nationals Type II event.

"I can't think of any moments of disaster with this deck, but the most embarrassing time was in the finals of a tourney when I temporarily lost my ability to read! I decided to Control Magic an opponent's Wildfire Emissary, but unfortunately the card I was holding was a Counterspell. Well, they both begin with the same letter, have two Blue in their casting cost and the artwork is similar!"

Mark is now ranked in the top 100 in the UK and, with his recent successes (and especially since Necro has left the scene), he has every chance of taking one of the top spots in both the UK and the world. Watch those rankings!

WHO IS MARK WRIGHT?

Mark is 23 years old and started playing *Magic* when *Antiquities* was released. He developed the ability to completely underestimate cards early, which resulted in several bad trades and a much more cautious attitude towards trading. Recently he has won The Gathering V, Birmingham and Nottingham Type II tournaments, and has several 2nd and 3rd places to his credit.

the gaming magazine arcane reviews THIS MONTH

The Icons

Each review in arcane is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:

- Books and Supplements
- Computer Games and Utilities
- Dice Games and Expansions
- Collectable Card Games and Expansions
- Roleplaying Systems
- Board Games, Miniature Systems

The Scores

Everything reviewed in arcane gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

10/10
Perfect.
There's simply nothing better.

9/10
Excellent, a classic.
Highly recommended.

8/10
Very good, with few problems.
Recommended.

7/10
Good, but not exceptional.

6/10
Above average, but not without problems.

5/10
Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

4/10
Below average, but not without merit.

3/10
Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

2/10
Very poor, should be avoided.

1/10
Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

Cthulhu Live

on page 58

Live-action *Call of Cthulhu*? You'd have to be mad to even try it... Wouldn't you?

Dicemaster

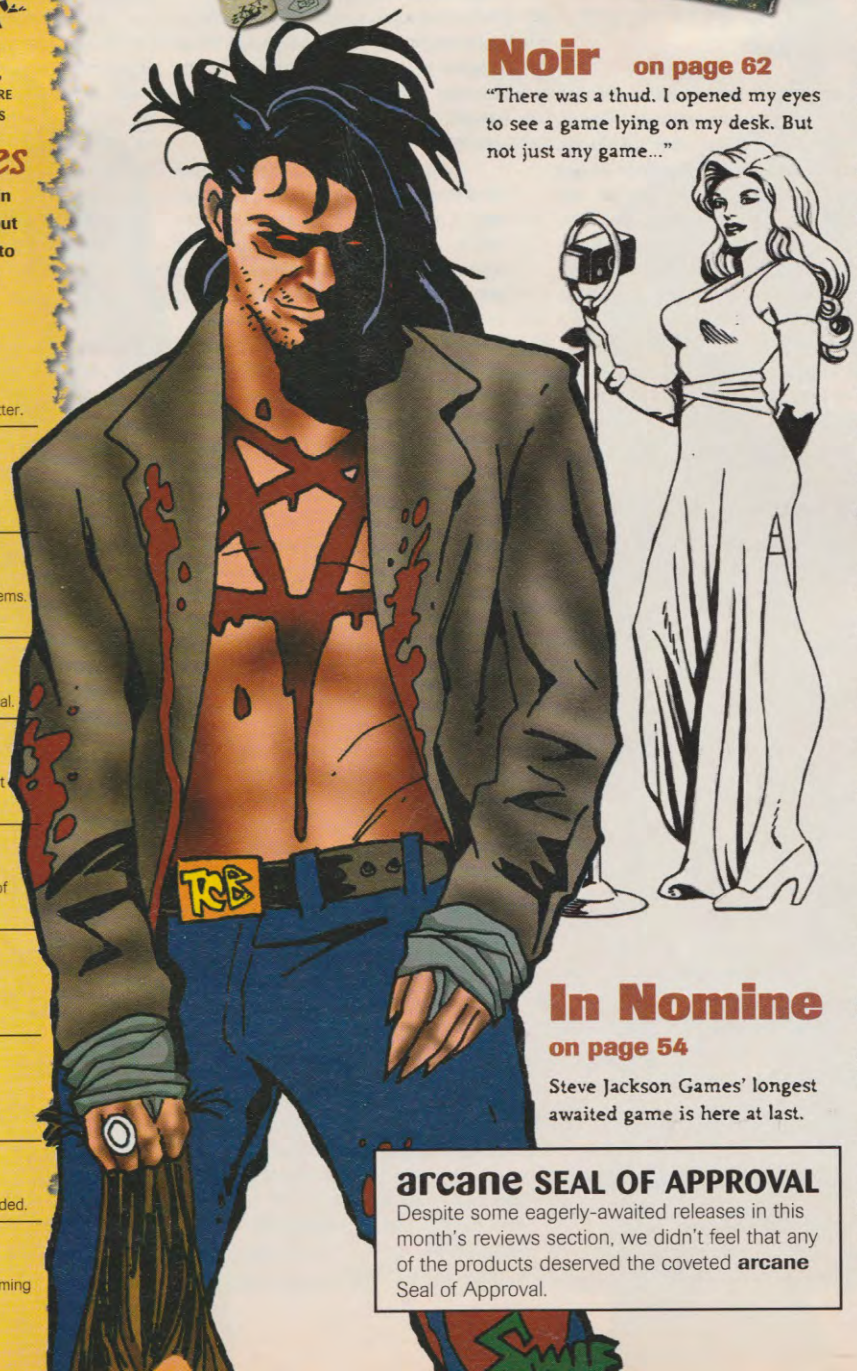
on page 60

Have ICE and Hobbygames got it right?

Noir

on page 62

"There was a thud. I opened my eyes to see a game lying on my desk. But not just any game..."



In Nomine

on page 54

Steve Jackson Games' longest awaited game is here at last.

arcane SEAL OF APPROVAL

Despite some eagerly-awaited releases in this month's reviews section, we didn't feel that any of the products deserved the coveted **arcane** Seal of Approval.

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In Nomine

Yes, it's here at last. No, really, it is...

Even in the roleplaying industry, well known to be plagued by delays, three and a half years is a long time to wait for something. But that's how long it's taken for Steve Jackson Games to finally release *In Nomine*, its game of the war between Heaven and Hell.

In fact, the only book we know of that's managed to beat it in the tardiness stakes was Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu*, which finally saw the light of day last month after four years of promises. Luckily, *Delta Green* was more than worth the wait. But can the same be said of *In Nomine*, now it's here?

Hmm. Well, that's something of a tricky one. We'll come back to it in a bit.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME

In Nomine is based on a French roleplaying game – or rather, two French roleplaying games that were sold in the same box, *In Nomine Satanis* and *Magna Veritas*. It is set in a version of our modern world where both God and the Devil exist, and Heaven and Hell are locked in a struggle for supremacy.

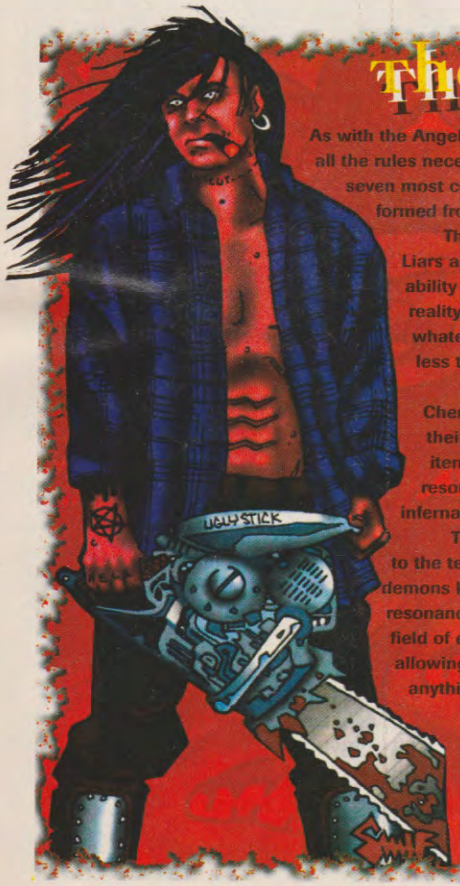
In the world of *In Nomine*, reality as we know it is just a manifestation of a pattern known as 'the Symphony'. Everything that exists, along with its past and its future, is a part of the Symphony. By creating this pattern, God created the universe, and Himself.

Within the Symphony there are three levels of reality: the Corporeal, which is the realm of the physical; the Celestial, the realm of spirit; and the Ethereal, the realm of mind, which divides the other two.

The Angels were created by God as the instruments of the Symphony. These celestial beings are closely attuned to its intricate themes, resonating with its complex patterns, and are tasked with watching over it and protecting it.

Angels are organised into a number of different groups and ranks. At a basic level, each Angel is a member of a Choir, which defines the nature of their resonance with the Symphony. Angels are also divided by rank, the most important aspect of which are Words.

Words represent a specific aspect of the Symphony – War, Fire, or Fax Machines, for example. When an Angel



The Demonic Bands

As with the Angelic Choirs, *In Nomine* also includes all the rules necessary to play Demons from the seven most common bands. Six of them are formed from Fallen Angels...

The Balseraphs: Fallen Seraphim, The Liars are aptly named. They possess the ability to impose their own twisted view of reality on others, convincing them that whatever the Balseraph says is nothing less than complete truth.

The Djinn: Twisted shadows of the Cherubim, The Stalkers have retained their ability to attune themselves with items or people, however this resonance is put to dark use by their infernal superiors.

The Calabim: Ofanim who succumb to the temptations of evil become the demons known as The Destroyers, their resonance for movement corrupted into a field of entropy which surrounds them, allowing them to crush and destroy anything in sight.

The Habbalah: Fallen Elohim, The Punishers have become ruled by their own dark emotions, losing their sense of objectivity and reason altogether. They can still sense emotions, but can also perceive the feelings that would cause someone the most harm, and unleash them in a crippling psychic attack.

The Lilim: The only band of Demons not made up from Fallen Angels, the Lilim are the creations of Lilith, produced by God as the first wife of Adam. They are celestial influence peddlers, able to sense a person's needs or weaknesses, and impose their own price for fulfilling them – the classic 'deal with a devil'.

The Shedim: The Corrupters are among the most disturbing of the Demonic Bands, and by far the most alien. Fallen Kyriotates, they can possess the bodies of multiple corporeal beings, but use this ability to grind down and weaken their victims' wills, slowly forcing them to perform evil acts.

The Impudites: Fallen Mercurians, The Takers are the most human of Demons, and actually like mankind. This doesn't stop them from using their deep understanding of the Forces of the Symphony to drain them of Essence, the primal energy of the universe, though...

nine

is given a Word, protecting and promoting the concept it represents becomes the purpose of their existence. The more important the concept of the Word is, the more status and power is gained by the Angel bound to it.

The most powerful Word-bound angels are the Archangels, the rulers of Heaven. Each Archangel is dedicated to a Word of great power and importance, and is in turn served by Angels bound to lesser but related Words (Gabriel, Archangel of Fire, for example, might be served by the Angel of Safety Matches). Archangels are also served by servitors – Angels without Words of their own – who might either serve the Archangel directly, or serve one of the Archangel's associated Word-bound Angels.

Of course, because Angels are individuals and many aspects of the Symphony are often in conflict, Heaven is a political place. The Angel of Safety Matches, for example, might be locked in an intense rivalry with the Angel of Zippo Lighters. Although both are likely to be servants of the Archangel Gabriel, they may compete for her time and attention.

What makes things even more complicated are the Diabolicals. Many ages ago, a third of the angels rebelled against God. Led by Lucifer, these angels were not content with being mere instruments of the Symphony; instead, they wished to bend it to their own wills. Outnumbered by the loyal angels, this group was cast out of Heaven into Hell, there to continue working towards the subversion of the Symphony.

These fallen Angels, who are now known as the Diabolicals, have organised themselves along similar lines to Heaven. Each Demon is a member of a specific Band, which determines their ability to enforce their will on the Symphony.

The rulers of Hell are the Demon Princes, who are similar in status to the Archangels, and Words have the same importance to them as they do to Angels. What's more, many Words are shared between Heaven and Hell. The Demon of Public Transport, for example, may be pitted against the Angel of Public Transport, each trying to influence their Words to the service of Good or Evil.

The corporeal realm of the Earth has become the battleground between these two sides, the Demons attempting to realise their own selfish visions, while the Angels fight to protect the divine pattern of the Symphony.

Stuck between the two sides is mankind, gifted by God with free will, and thus the ability to choose between good and evil.

The nature of the beast

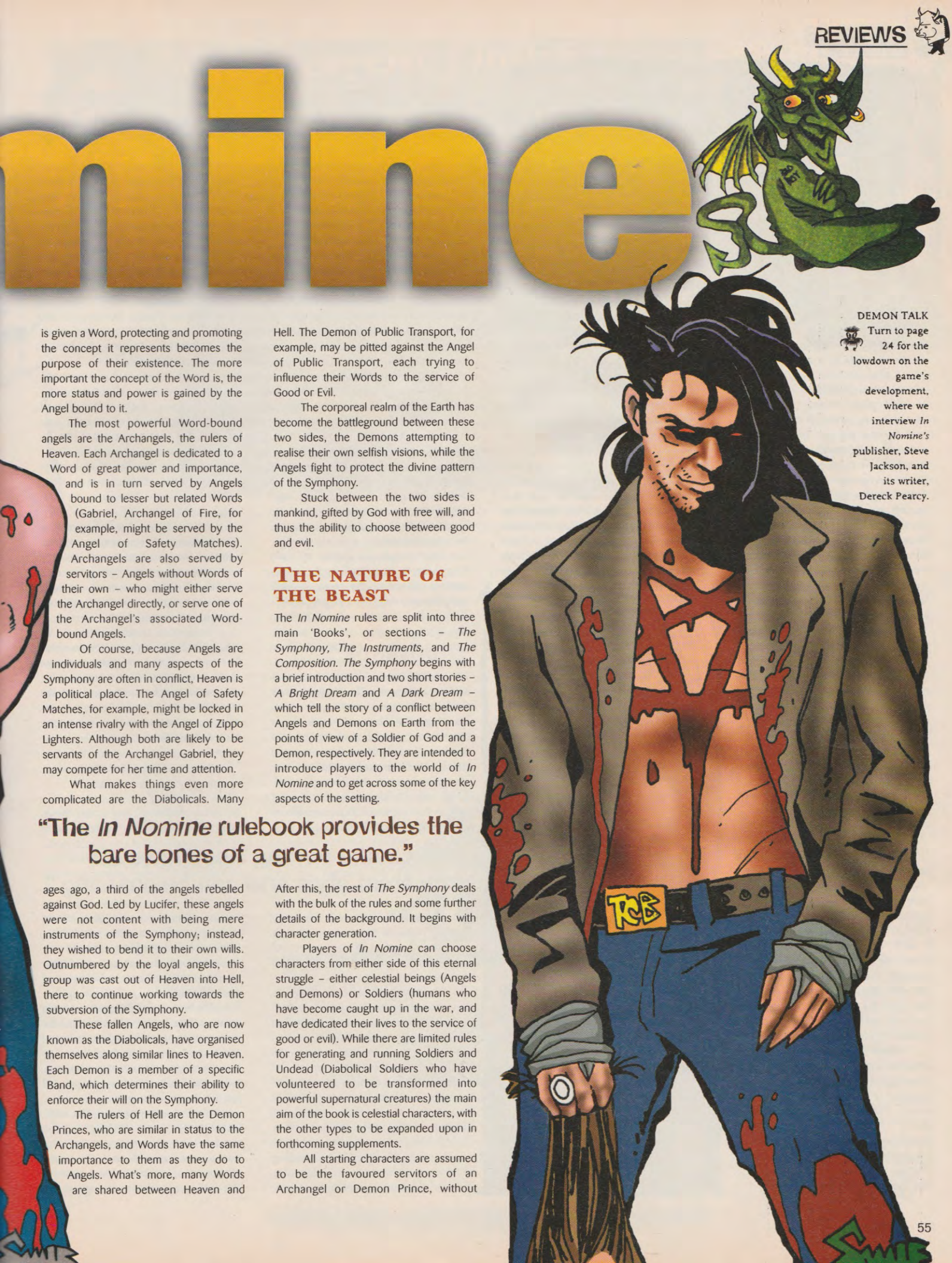
The *In Nomine* rules are split into three main 'Books', or sections – *The Symphony, The Instruments,* and *The Composition. The Symphony* begins with a brief introduction and two short stories – *A Bright Dream* and *A Dark Dream* – which tell the story of a conflict between Angels and Demons on Earth from the points of view of a Soldier of God and a Demon, respectively. They are intended to introduce players to the world of *In Nomine* and to get across some of the key aspects of the setting.

"The *In Nomine* rulebook provides the bare bones of a great game."

After this, the rest of *The Symphony* deals with the bulk of the rules and some further details of the background. It begins with character generation.

Players of *In Nomine* can choose characters from either side of this eternal struggle – either celestial beings (Angels and Demons) or Soldiers (humans who have become caught up in the war, and have dedicated their lives to the service of good or evil). While there are limited rules for generating and running Soldiers and Undead (Diabolical Soldiers who have volunteered to be transformed into powerful supernatural creatures) the main aim of the book is celestial characters, with the other types to be expanded upon in forthcoming supplements.

All starting characters are assumed to be the favoured servitors of an Archangel or Demon Prince, without



DEMON TALK

Turn to page 24 for the lowdown on the game's development, where we interview *In Nomine's* publisher, Steve Jackson, and its writer, Dereck Pearcy.

Words of their own. Players must first decide what type of character they want to play, then pick their Superior (and, for celestials, their Choir or Band).

In game terms, *In Nomine* characters are defined at the most basic level by the number of Forces they possess of the three aspects of the Symphony – Corporeal, Ethereal, and Celestial. A normal human has 5 Forces, a Soldier begins the game with 6, and starting celestials (whether Angel or Demon) have 9. Players can assign their Forces between the three areas as they like, although in all but a couple of cases there must be at least one Force in each. A Demon, for example, might choose to have 4 Corporeal Forces, 2 Ethereal and 3 Celestial.

Once the Forces have been assigned, characteristics are chosen. Each Force is associated with two characteristics: one of which represents its power, and the other the degree of control. The Corporeal characteristics are Strength and Agility, the Ethereal characteristics are Intelligence and Precision, and the Celestial characteristics are Will and Perception. A character has a total of 4 points for every Force to split between the two characteristics in each area, with a maximum value of 12. A Demon with 4 Corporeal Forces, for example, has 16 points to split between Strength and Agility.

Once the various characteristics have been decided upon, the character then has four times its total Forces in Character Points to spend on a wide range of things that are collectively referred to as Resources. Despite the various differences between them, pretty much all the Resources are ranked in levels from 1 to 6, with each level costing a certain amount of points.

Resources include Artifacts (objects with varying abilities and powers), Roles (which give a celestial character an 'identity' in the Corporeal world), Servants (from humans to spirits), Skills, Songs (which are incantations that allow the user to alter the Symphony), and Vessels (the physical bodies that celestials use to visit the Corporeal realm).

Dicing with the Devil?

In Nomine's rule system is based on a universal mechanic which is used to resolve just about any task – the D666. The player rolls three six-sided dice: two of the same colour, and one of a different colour. To succeed in a task, the total of the two similar dice must be equal to or less than the target number. The value of the third die (the check digit) determines the degree of success or failure.

Target numbers for most tasks are based on a characteristic, modified by any relevant skill or ability and the referee's judgement of how difficult the feat is. Busting open a door, for example, would be based on Strength. Shooting someone with a pistol is based on Precision, modified by the character's Ranged Weapons skill (or lack thereof).

If the target number is 12 or higher, the character automatically succeeds and any excess is added to the check digit – someone with Precision 10 and Ranged Weapons 6 (target number 16), for example, would hit automatically and add 4 to the check digit.

Players can also choose to make a roll more or less risky. Increasing the risk lowers the target number by 1, but adds 1 to the check digit, and vice versa for lowering the risk.

Finally, if a character rolls 111 or 666, the forces of Good or Evil intervene on the character's behalf. Whether this is a good or bad thing depends on the side the character is fighting for. If an Angel rolls 111 (representing the Holy Trinity), the power of God ensures he succeeds spectacularly. On the other hand, a Demon rolling 111 is in for a bad time. Rolling 666, by contrast, is good for servants of the Devil and bad for those on the side of Heaven.

This simple mechanic is used throughout *In Nomine,* with the values used to determine the target number being the only thing that really changes.

A Cast of Thousands

The second book, *The Instruments,* is split into six chapters. The first three cover the forces of God, describing the seven most important Choirs of Angels, 13 of the most powerful Archangels, and Heaven. The last three chapters deal instead with the servants of the Devil. The seven key demonic Bands are detailed, along with 13 of the most influential Demon Princes, and with an overview of the celestial realm of Hell.

The Bands and Choirs are effectively celestial 'races'. All the members of each Choir are attuned to different aspects of the Symphony, which in turn determines their Resonance.

An Angel's Resonance is its connection to the Symphony, which defines its most basic nature. As well as affecting its personality and point of view, an Angel's Resonance also allows the Angel to perceive certain aspects of reality with great accuracy – Seraphim, for example, are attuned to truth, and their Resonance allows them to detect falsehood. Acting against their natures – a Seraph telling a lie – disrupts an Angel's affinity with the Symphony, causing Dissonance. Dissonance not only makes it harder to use the powers of Resonance, but can also, if left unchecked, cause Discord – a permanent fracture in an Angel's relationship with the Symphony – or can even lead to Fall, with the Angel eventually becoming a Demon.

Demonic Bands are twisted mirror images of the Angelic Choirs. Demons also possess a Resonance, but this represents their ability to enforce their own view of reality on the Symphony by the power of their will. The Balseraphs, for example, are the Fallen Seraphim, and possess the ability to convince anyone of the truth of what they say – even if it's the foulest lie imaginable.

Likewise, though, Demons are also bound by their natures, and acting against them causes them Dissonance, which in turn can lead to Discord.

Almost as important as a celestial's Band or Choir, though, is the Superior the celestial serves. Each Archangel and Demon Prince is bound to a Word of great power. While serving a Superior allows a celestial to gain special powers, known as Attunements, it also ties them to their Superior's Word. Acting against the Word can also generate Dissonance in both Angels and Demons.

The last book, *The Composition,* is the smallest, and it covers a variety of subjects. There are brief rules for Soldiers and Undead characters, there are notes on celestial spirits, and there are eight sample characters – four Angels and four Demons – of varying power.

Finally there's a section of advice for refs, covering the styles of play to which *In Nomine* is suited and giving campaign ideas, along with notes on running a game with characters from either side of the War. Having Angels and Demons in the same group isn't impossible, but it does make things difficult.

The Question at Hand

So is *In Nomine* any good? Well, unfortunately the answer is yes and no.

"...the writing does have an irreverent style and can be amusing."

On the positive side, the basic idea is intriguing and ripe with possibilities. Likewise, the rules are fairly clear and easy to understand at heart – the D666 is especially elegant, being both simple and extremely flexible.

The book is well designed and looks great. Although by all accounts the humour of the French originals has been reduced, the writing does have an irreverent style, and can be very amusing. In fact there are only a few problems. It's just that they're large ones.

The first is the layout of the rules. Although the book *looks* great, the structure and organisation of the rules leaves a lot to be desired. The worst offender is the first book, *The Symphony.* The rules are scattered throughout the

The Angelic choirs

In Nomine **includes some roleplaying notes and rules for the seven most common Choirs of Angels, which are...**

The Seraphim: Also known as The Most Holy, the Seraphim are the Angels closest to God (and, consequently, the least human). They resonate with the patterns of truth, and can perceive lies from the jarring notes they make in the Symphony.

The Cherubim: Far from the small winged babies of Renaissance art, The Guardians are the most dedicated and loyal of all the Angels. With a simple touch they can attune their own pattern of existence to that of any other object or person, and from then on will be able to sense its exact location and condition.

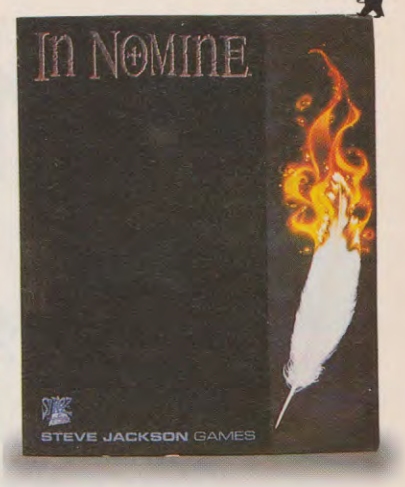
The Ofanim: Angels of motion and speed, The Wheels are attuned to movement. The Ofanim are the swiftest of the Choirs – but in many ways, the least stable. Their resonance with the Symphony allows them to perceive the fastest route to any destination.

The Elohim: Balanced and logical, the Choir often known as The Powers sits halfway between the divinity of the Seraphim and the humanity of the Mercurians. Their dispassionate objectivity allows them to sense the emotions of any other being.

The Malakim: God's warriors, The Virtues are often extremely destructive and cruel, but they are also the most stalwart defenders of Heaven. Their honour-bound natures allow them to judge the integrity of anyone they meet at a glance.

The Kyriotates: The most fundamentally alien of the Angels, The Dominations are little more than fragmentary collections of emotions and formless mind. Kyriotates can, in fact, borrow the physical bodies of many corporeal beings at once, but they have no vessels of their own.

The Mercurians: The most human (and the least divine) of the Choirs, the Friends of Man are Heaven's diplomats and deal makers. They resonate with the patterns of relationships, and can understand the most complex social groups almost instantly.



VITAL INFO

title:	*In Nomine*
system:	A roleplaying game
price:	£16.95
publisher:	Steve Jackson Games
	001 512 447 7866
released:	Out now
e-mail:	sjg@io.com
web site:	http://www.io.com/sjgames/

And the players said...

paul: "I love the idea, but I can see it's going to be hard to run."

steve: "A lot of potential – if only there were rather more background."

dan: "This is good, but I expected more after waiting three years"

Looking elsewhere...

The obvious comparison is with White Wolf's *World of Darkness* games, all of which feature supernatural player characters in a world much like our own, or perhaps Chaosium's *Nephilim*. *In Nomine* has a very different atmosphere to these games, though, and takes itself a lot less seriously as a whole.

The Final Verdict

"The *In Nomine* rules provide the framework for an impressive game system, and there's a lot to recommend them. On the other hand, though, they're let down by poor organisation and a lack of background information. Good, but not as good as you might expect after the long development time."

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

text, often having different aspects explained in different areas, and the whole section is poorly put together.

An example is the rules for Resources. They're first mentioned in the character generation section (page 36), then general rules are given after the explanation of the game system (page 41), then specific examples and descriptions begin on page 70. It's all rather confusing.

Likewise, the character generation section makes no mention of how to calculate the damage a character can take – the rules and formulae needed aren't mentioned until the combat rules, and even then are split between three sections (one for each type of combat).

This lack of structure, combined with the fact that the game starts using specific terms and names before they've been explained (talking about a specific Choir before you know what a Choir is and what that specific one is like, for example), makes reading *In Nomine* the first time a lot harder than it should be. You really need to read the book twice just to get a grip on it, and even then it can be hard to find something.

Compounding this is the worst problem with *In Nomine* – the lack of coherent information about the game's setting and background. Although there are some explanations, they're scattered throughout the book, and even then, you're left with a lot of questions.

For example, you're never told exactly what the Demons and Angels are fighting for – what they hope to achieve – let alone given specific examples of the kind of things they get up to. A fair amount can be extrapolated from bits and pieces throughout the book, but it's just not enough. There's not even a dedicated discussion of the concepts of Good and Evil and how they apply to the game. Considering that *In Nomine* is about the battle between Heaven and Hell, this is a fairly unforgivable lack.

Of course, experienced referees can come up with their own justifications and explanations, but then you run the risk of future supplements contradicting your decisions. Besides which, the referee shouldn't *have* to make these kinds of decisions – this stuff really should have been covered in detail, even if only as a discussion of possibilities.

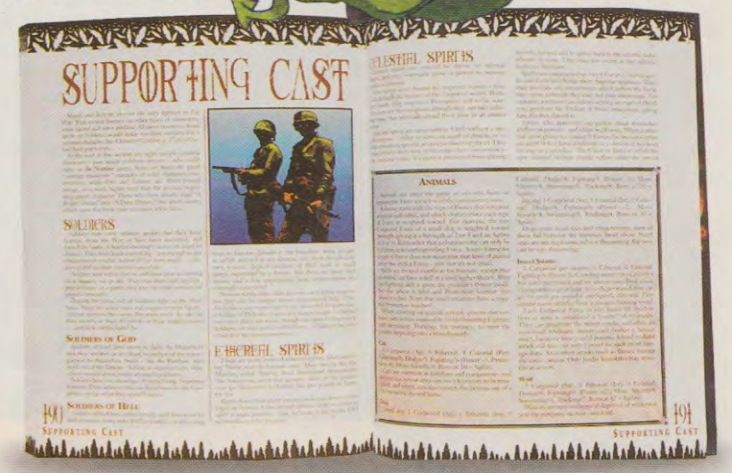
Finally, and perhaps least importantly, there are a lot of small niggles with the system. Although most of these come down to simple judgement calls by the referee, given that three and a half years of work have gone into the game you'd expect the whole book to be much tighter and clearer.

In addition, there's a real problem with the combat system in that even average humans can take huge amounts of punishment – an average person can take as much damage as a car, for example, requiring about four or five hits from a revolver before he is even knocked unconscious!

Despite all this, I have to admit to liking *In Nomine* quite a lot. At its heart, it's a great idea for a roleplaying game, with a simple and effective game system and a background that can be adapted to a wide variety of playing styles. It's also one of the few games around that doesn't shy away from asking players to make moral decisions and consider the implications of what they're doing.

The *In Nomine* rulebook provides the bare bones of a great game, but it will require a lot of work to flesh out. Its success or failure as a game system will largely depend on the quality and depth of the support it receives.

If you don't mind a challenge there's a lot of potential here. However, less experienced referees would do better to wait and see how good the support material turns out to be, and whether it answers a lot of the questions that the rulebook poses.



Cthulhu Live

Life-sized models of Cthulhu, teams of seven or eight NPCs, scene shifts and special effects – My God, Carter, it was The Unplayable!!!!

LITTLE DID YOU KNOW... One particularly evil idea in the book is for the referee to have one of his NPC helpers *pretending* to be a player so that, at a crucial moment in the game, this secret *agent provocateur* can double-cross the party, or turn into a werewolf, or go mad...

The idea of live action *Call of Cthulhu* is, of course, completely and utterly mad. The Cthulhu Mythos is about creatures so alien and hideous that Lovecraft himself rarely told us what they looked like. If ever a game was best left in the players' imaginations, then surely this is it.

There have been live action games based on established tabletop systems before, but they have always been free-form, limited environment exercises. White Wolf's *Mind's Eye Theatre* deals with Vampiric conclaves – characters in pale make-up meeting a single room. West End's live action *Star Wars* game concentrates on tense meetings between rebel agents and double-crossing bounty hunters. It does not expect you build life-sized Death Stars on your bedroom floor.

Yet the madmen behind *Cthulhu Live* do expect you to construct life sized simulacrums of HP Lovecraft's repertoire of blasphemous, eldritch abominations. A large chunk of the book is given over to enthusiastic descriptions of what you can do with latex, face paint and rubber masks, though admittedly these monsters are only likely to appear in the closing minutes of a game.

As in the tabletop version, most of your investigators' time will be spent interacting with human beings of various sorts. Nevertheless, as a climax to a session, the authors really do expect your players to walk into your smoke-filled basement, and see an immense heaving Shoggoth in the chaotic flickering of a strobe light. "The screams of terror may well be genuine," it says. Doubtless. Your landlord will probably have something to say about it as well.

The 'immense heaving Shoggoth' consists of three or four of the referee's friends covered in a large number of old sheets tie-dyed in strange colours and Velcroed together at the edges. The assistants poke tentacles out through slits in the cloth. "Make sure," say the rules, "that they keep the sheet taut so that the whole assembly looks like a shifting blob rather than four guys under a dirty bedspread." Quite.

The very same sheets, in conjunction with the frame of an old tent, can be used to make a Cthulhu of your very own – or, at any rate, the Great Old One's head, with big red lights to represent his eyes. Valerie Singleton, eat your heart out!

The Fungi from Yuggoth? Piece of cake – just make foam rubber wings and pincers, wrap your player in yet another tie-dyed sheet (a lot of people are going to be having sleepless nights if this game takes off) and give him a helmet "painted to look like a human brain". Green make-up can approximate the "Innesmouth look". Humanoid monsters are dead easy if you are prepared to wobble around on stilts. Dim lighting, says the book, is not only spooky but also "helps conceal minor flaws in costuming and props".

Like I said – completely mad.

What is arguably even madder is the attempt by the authors to convince us to run pretty much full-scale *Cthulhu* adventures in a live action setting. Maybe that's fair enough. After you have created a life-sized Shoggoth, I can see that moving the furniture of your house around to represent the five or six rooms in your adventure setting is going to seem like a fairly minor task. A garden shed, we are told, can easily double up as a mausoleum.

Much more daunting is the process of briefing a troupe of your friends to play the roles of the various NPCs in the game. You'll need people who can combine the skills of good roleplaying, good acting and good refereeing, since each person will have to understand the

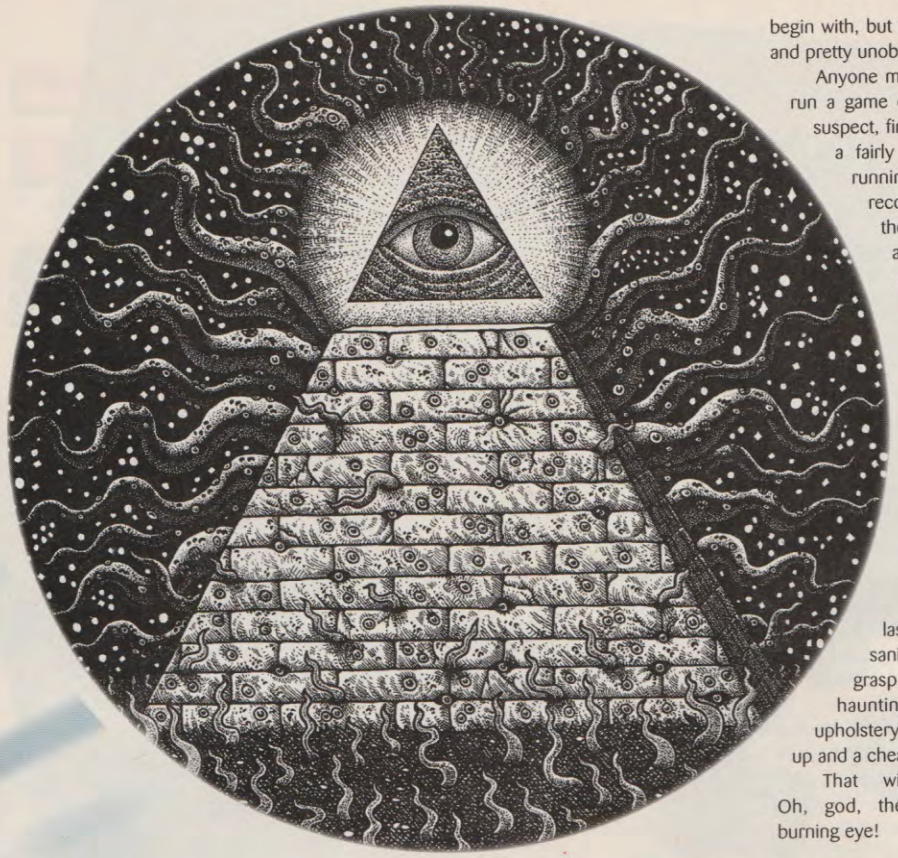
GIVE US A CALL If anyone out there actually decides to run a session of *Cthulhu Live*, we'd like to hear from you – write to us or e-mail us at the usual **arcane** addresses...

But officer, I can explain

In the early days of *Treasure Trap*, an old lady is said to have phoned the police when she saw weirdly dressed folk hitting each other with axes in the park. A game which suggests that you dig six foot holes for monsters to emerge from or perform strange rituals with candles and chanting is going to be much more susceptible to this sort of thing, so not surprisingly, *Cthulhu Live* falls over itself to tell playing groups to be sensible. Don't run your game on land without getting the owner's permission. Don't run your game in ruined houses if they aren't safe. Don't to anything in a public place which might freak out or offend passers by.

Surprisingly, there are no warnings about freaking out players. Though people who join the game will presumably know what they are letting themselves in for, live action horror could be quite traumatic if it went too far. (There is also a danger that an irresponsible referee might exploit a player's known weaknesses to make it more scary.) White Wolf's *Wraith: The Oblivion* suggests giving the players a secret 'safe word' they can use to warn the referee if he goes too far.

I'd say use this in *Cthulhu Live*.



begin with, but these are very well done and pretty unobtrusive.

Anyone mad enough to attempt to run a game of *Cthulhu Live* would, I suspect, find it more like putting on a fairly sophisticated play than running a LARP in the normally recognised sense – a lot of the stuff in the book reads almost like a briefing for a semi-professional LARP company than rules for something that a group of gamers might put on for themselves.

But you know the maddest thing of all? Reading this tome has left me thinking that live action *Cthulhu* is not only possible, but actually sounds like a good idea.

Even as I write, the last tiny pieces of my own sanity start to slip from my grasp. Before long, I will be haunting theatrical shops and upholstery stores, looking for make-up and a cheap source of foam rubber.

That window! That window! Oh, god, the three-lobed, tie-dyed burning eye!

"The 'immense heaving Shoggoth' consists of several of the referee's friends covered in old tie-dyed sheets."

scenario and his or her NPC's place within it, and then play out the character in the face of interrogation when the actual players finally arrive on the scene. They might also have to be prepared to do quick costume changes if there are more characters in the game than the referee has little helpers.

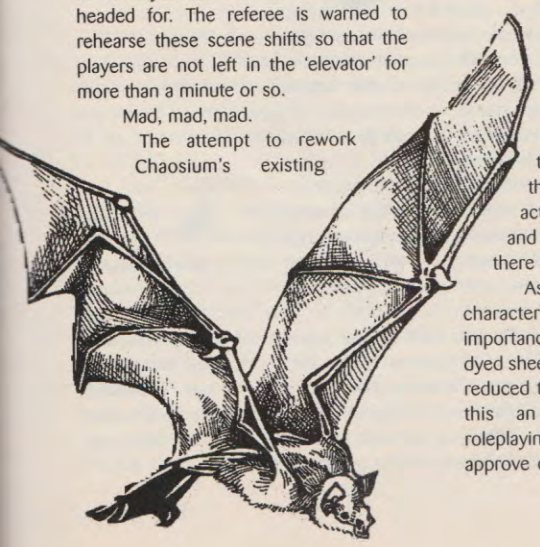
One of the scenarios in the book is set in a multi-storey mental asylum. A small curtained-off area represents the elevator. When the players step into the elevator, the referee and the NPCs have to move the furniture around to conform to the layout of the floor the PCs are headed for. The referee is warned to rehearse these scene shifts so that the players are not left in the 'elevator' for more than a minute or so.

Mad, mad, mad.

The attempt to rework Chaosium's existing *Call of Cthulhu* rules isrelatively sane by comparison. It is based on the now familiar idea of choosing and fleshing out character archetypes such as 'gangster' and 'priest'. Essentially a character has skills rated on a scale of 1 to 20 and the referee has to set difficulty numbers for each task. (There are, very properly, no dice or random elements involved, and we are told that none of these numbers should be referred to in the game since this would break the illusion.) If a player with DEX 10 tries to open a locked door, and the referee knows it is a task of difficulty 15, then he whispers quietly that the player can't manage it.

The one time when mechanics intervene is in combat, when the players have to wave around cards with their skill numbers printed on them. This isn't ideal, but in a live action game involving firearms and the casting of spells, I guess there isn't much alternative.

As in the tabletop version, your character's Sanity rating is of crucial importance – when you see all those tie-dyed sheets and foam rubber, you can be reduced to a gibbering heap. ("Consider this an opportunity to excel in roleplaying," says the book.) I don't really approve of rules in live action games to



VITAL INFO

title:	*Cthulhu Live*
system:	Live-action roleplaying
price:	TBA
publisher:	Chaosium
	001 510 547 7681
released:	April
e-mail:	chaosium@aol.com
web site:	http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html

Also available...

West End's rather disappointing *Star Wars Live Action* dealt with, er, live action *Star Wars*. White Wolf's various *Minds Eye Theatre* games allow you to ponce about dressed in various gothic costumes. The Australian Games Group's *Freeform Book* is sadly out of print, but snap it up if you ever see a second-hand copy.

The Final Verdict

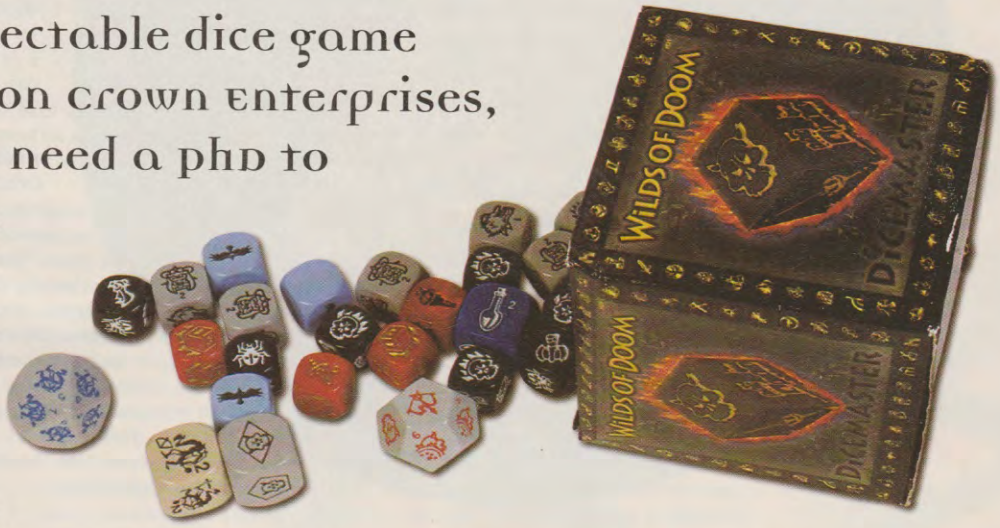
"This is a game which only the most ambitious playing group is going to be able to run - but the information and advice it contains could hardly be improved on. My overall score reflects this."

Andrew Rilstone

Score 9/10

Dicemaster: Cities of Doom

The latest collectable dice game comes from Iron Crown Enterprises, but you won't need a PhD to understand it.



COLLECTABLE? *Cities of Doom* is described as a 'customisable' dice game. In the two basic sets that we had for review, only one die was anything more than superficially different, and the *Wilds of Doom* expansion set is always the same. However, the planned *Doom Cubes* will be available in packs of eight, with the eight dice randomly selected from over 100 different types.

Collectable dice games seem to have become all the rage with games publishers in the last couple of years. It all started, really, with TSR's rather excellent *Dragon Dice* (arcane 1). Just like *Magic* before it, *Dragon Dice* was such a success that it has inspired many other people to have a go.

This new offering from the combined forces of American roleplaying stalwarts Iron Crown Enterprises and UK outfit Hobbygames continues the tradition of taking established genres and converting them into a dice game. Whereas *Dragon Dice* is essentially a wargame converted into a dice game, though, and *Star Trek: TNG* (arcane 17) is a ship-to-ship space combat game, *Cities of Doom* takes the basic concepts of board games such as *Talisman* or *Dungeon Quest* and turns them into a plethora of multi-coloured, multi-sized dice. It also – perhaps unsurprisingly – has several conceptual elements in common with ICE's CCG, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* (arcane 4).

Cities of Doom is a two-player game in which each player takes on the role of an adventurer – rather predictably, dwarf, elf or human – and attempts to be the first to find six runes which are apparently required to summon the lost Book of Ulingit and re-unite the six lands. Or something. Anyway, the game comes in a box containing everything that one player needs to play.

The game itself is really pretty straightforward. The two players take it in turns. Using some of the dice you set up an adventure route – two large dice represent the beginning and end sites, while smaller dice make up four locations in between. Each turn, you try to move to the next location on the trail, battle the monster that resides there and – if you're successful – collect some of the longed-for runes.

The basic mechanic of the game involves using the Action dice. At the beginning of each turn you roll seven action dice, which yields a variety of results, some of which are as follows: Provisions, which you need to be able to move; Magic, which can be used to help you in combat; and Monsters, which you use to hinder your opponent on his turn. There is also a variety of other results which have special functions.

These Action dice can be saved up – put aside to be used on later turns – or used immediately. In every turn you can repeat the 'move, fight, collect treasure' subroutine as long as you have enough Action dice, but using them removes them from your pool, so you will eventually run out.

Crucially, you *have* to keep some Action dice aside because they're also used in the rune discovery phase. Once you've run out of Action dice (or decided to reserve those you have left for your next turn), play passes to your opponent.

WHAT DO I GET? Each set of *Cities of Doom* consists of 32 dice and six press-out rune markers, a set of the rules and a colour identification chart for all the available dice in *Cities of Doom*, *Wilds of Doom* and *Doom Cubes*.

GOING IT ALONE One of the good things about *Cities of Doom* is that with just a little thought, it's quite possible to have a satisfactory solo game.

wilds of doom

This is the first expansion set for *Cities of Doom* and consists of 26 new dice. You'll need to have *Cities of Doom* to be able to use it, but you only need one copy of *Wilds of Doom* to share between two players.

***Wilds of Doom* introduces a few new twists to the game, chief among which is the beefing up of the monster encounters. Instead of just generating combat point totals to decide who wins, *WOD* introduces mass creature combat and combat dice for the monsters, turning the combat into something that can itself last for several rounds. It also introduces a mechanic for limiting the number of goes your opponent has before passing his turn over to you. And, among several levels of extra complexity, it adds in advanced weapons for upgraded characters.**

Unfortunately, while these sound like great additions, in practice they tend to make the straightforwardly fun basic game just too cumbersome and the large quantities of dice-rolling required stop being amusing and become a chore. If you just love complex games, this could be something you may enjoy. Otherwise, though, it tends to detract from the simple fun which is *COD*'s greatest appeal.

VITAL INFO

title:	*Dicemaster: Cities of Doom*
system:	A collectable dice game
price:	Starter set £12.99 *Wilds of Doom* – an expansion set for *Cities of Doom* £8.50
publisher:	ICE/Hobbygames
	01903 730998
released:	Out now
web site:	http://www.hobbygames.com

And the players said...

Andy: "A lot more fun than you'd think, to look at it. I liked it."

Jon: "I like the basic mechanics; it just doesn't seem to have enough of a goal."

Paul: "Not bloody elves and dwarves again! What's wrong with a new idea for a change?"

The main crux of the action in *Cities of Doom* is the combat. There are five special Combat dice which are rolled to accumulate an attack total. This is then matched against the monster's attack total, which is derived from various effects of the Terrain dice and can be augmented by your opponent using one of his reserved Monster results on an Action die.

Each character has a primary and secondary weapon, worth varying points, and you roll the Combat dice as often as you like in an attempt to collect the required number to defeat the monster, rather like collecting suits in *Yahtzee*. Each combat dice also has one face – a burning skull – that removes that die from that combat, so each time you roll to try to get a better total, you risk losing a die.

There are other Action dice results that add extra levels of complexity to the gameplay. For example, there are Weapon Upgrade results that let you try to improve the damage points of your primary and secondary weapons; there are Rune Stealers that let you try to steal some of the runes your opponent has already collected; and there are still others that increase the difficulty of the monsters that your opponent faces.

The game is relatively simple to get to grips with – you'll have understood all the basic concepts by the time you finish your first game – and the inclusion of classic re-rolling mechanics like the one from *Yahtzee* ensure that it's quite fun to play. It doesn't have the strategic depth of *Dragon Dice* or the instant fun playability of the battling monsters dice game *Chaos Progenitus* (**arcane** 11), but it is a pleasant diversion that you'd happily play in a spare hour. There's no indication of age range on any of the packaging, but it's my bet that this game would be enjoyed a lot by younger players.

One gripe I do have is that the rules are a little confusing. There is a set of starter rules, then there are the standard rules, then optional rules, then you add *Wilds of Doom* rules for use with the supplemental dice (see panel bottom left) and then advanced rules for the forthcoming *Doom Cubes* expansion. Each of these sets of rules changes the way the game is played quite considerably, yet only one – the starter set – is fully explained. The others just introduce you to the rule changes. This can mean that if you're playing with the *Wilds of Doom*, you'll have to look up three separate sets of rules before you get a ruling. This would have been easily avoided if the publishers had just made every set of rules a complete walkthrough of the game the way that the starter rules are.

Cities of Doom is a fine, enjoyable game which, while not exactly intellectually challenging, has enough satisfying rules mechanics to it that you'll enjoy playing it. Dice games in the past have not made enough of the actual pleasure of rolling lots of dice – something *Cities of Doom* manages well.

"A fine, enjoyable game. Not intellectually challenging, but it makes the most of the sheer pleasure of rolling dice."

also available...

None of the other dice games we've mentioned in the review is quite the same as *Cities of Doom*, but they are all worth a look. They are: *Dragon Dice*, *Chaos Progenitus* and *Star Trek: TNG Collectible Dice Game*. The only other dice game we've seen was the noble but doomed attempt at making a roleplaying game out of just dice, *Throwing Stones*, which we gave 4/10 in **arcane** 3.

The Final Verdict

"*Cities of Doom* is a good, fun game, but it's perhaps a bit disappointing that its subject matter is nothing more than a dungeon hack under a different name. Good for passing some spare time, sure enough – but it's not going to revolutionise gaming. Nor will it become another *Dragon Dice*."

Steve Faragher

Scores:

Cities of Doom 7/10

Wilds of Doom 6/10

Noir

"*Noir* isn't style over substance, *Noir* is style *and* substance." So says the rulebook, but is this really the case?

he Maltese Falcon, *The Big Sleep* and *Citizen Kane* are all mentioned as works of fiction that have been the inspiration for *Noir*, the roleplaying game of the *film noir* genre, but all the way through it I couldn't help but remember watching Mickey Spillaine's Mike Hammer when I was a kid.

I kept imagining Hammer as a character in the game, with the player constantly providing an observational monologue over the top of the action: "I met the other guys in a bar – I don't remember which one. We talked a while, and I eyed up this beautiful blonde broad. And her eyes just smouldered like hot coals in the rain." And similar nonsense.

Why mention this? Because, to be honest, I'm not sure whether the *Mike Hammer* series is *film noir* or not, and having finished reading *Noir*, I'm none the wiser...

This is a game about style – a very distinct style, which is excellently promoted through the vast tracts of fiction that the authors have used to illustrate the moods and feeling that they wanted to portray in writing this system. It's dark, in the 'foreboding' rather than the 'macabre' or 'overtly sinister' sense of the word; it's dangerous without really being violent; and it's timeless, in much the same way that the film *Seven* could have just as easily been set in the fifties as whenever it was supposed to be set. (See what I mean? It's timeless...)

This style is encapsulated by The City, which is the, er, city in which the Director (referee) is supposed to base all of the action. And just as in *Seven*, this city is unnamed; it's very grey, the hours between 6am and 6pm don't seem to exist unless they happen to fit the plot, and it probably always rains.

Characters in *Noir*, we are told, should be neither totally dark or light, neither good nor evil, but somewhere in between. An example? How about a bus driver who's happy to deliver packages for the mob around town, because the money he gets from it enables him to pay for an education for his kids, which he hopes will afford them a better lot in life than his own. There's a bad side to him, but it's countered by his good reason for being bad.

This makes for some potentially interesting characters. Indeed, the whole character generation process is geared around building a rationale for a character, then fleshing him out, choosing the character class (or Schtick, in this game) before adding skills, pros and cons and the other game mechanics which make him or her playable.

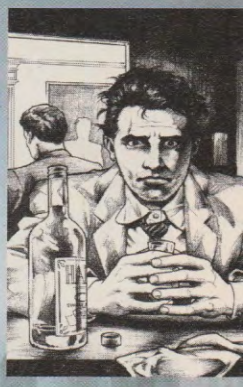
Even names are given before the majority of the other character attributes, and the character's name is used to help fill out his or her history. Tony Abolini, for instance, sounds decidedly Italian, so the character may be an Italian chef who's fallen on hard times and now owes money that he borrowed to keep his restaurant going.

These details, gradually fleshing out the character as he's created, end up producing a well-rounded, playable persona at the end of the process.

But there's another reason for giving the characters so much history right from the outset. The players in a game of *Noir* are supposed to contribute to the story and narrate their way through it almost as much as the Director. Which is a jolly good idea, being a move toward free-form gaming (after a fashion), though it's not something that you can expect any but the most experienced and able roleplayers to do well.

It's also something that only a very experienced referee can handle – with the players altering the story all the time, however minutely, he's going to have to be pretty bleeding special to adjust his idea of what's going on in a consistent manner, without it dramatically altering the course of the game.

And that means that the scenarios are all going to have to be pretty simple in order to work effectively without it all



WHAT YOU LOOKIN' AT? If you want to get hold of some of the films that inspired this game, such as *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, you'll be pleased to know that you can now buy them on video. Both are available as fairly cheap classics at about £8 each.

IT'S GOTHAM, INNIT? There are many parallels between The City in *Noir* and Gotham City in *Batman*, so it's well worth watching the *Batman* trilogy of films too. However, there's a danger that *Noir* could become a superhero game, albeit without any special powers, so avoid going too far down this route.

coming crashing down around the flustered Director's ears.

Some sample scenario ideas are presented in the rulebook: evicting squatters from one of the character's apartments; investigating a mystery jewellery box dropped by a dying man; helping a vicar recover stolen funds; and reliving the last days of a dying man.

All these scenarios are simple in their precepts yet have a potential complexity that will demand a great deal of players and referee alike. And each one is fairly disparate. Could these be strung together as a campaign? Erm, no. But then I don't think that they're supposed to be. Rather, these are suggested starting points for campaigns of a very different flavour – ones where it's up to the players and the Director to decide how they progress. Stories, not worlds.

And this brings me back to the point I was making at the beginning: I'm not entirely sure what constitutes a *Noir* scenario or campaign from reading through the rulebook, and I wouldn't feel entirely confident going off and attempting to create one.

Yes, the mood and style of the game are portrayed very well, but not, I'm afraid, the content. Despite the claim in the rulebook that *Noir* is both style *and* content, I simply can't agree.

it. So, before we go any further let's take a quick step backwards...

The system is extremely good, being based upon rolls of numbers of six-sided dice equal to the skill proficiency against which any check is being made, subject to modifiers which are imposed by the Director. It's very quick to use, it works well, and it makes a hell of a lot of sense in play, and there's not much more that you could want out of a skills system than that.

"The players are supposed to contribute to the story and narrate their way through it, which is a jolly good idea."

In this review I've hardly touched on the detail of the rules (or, indeed, much of what else the rulebook has to offer). But that's because I've attempted to get over some of the style of the game and the inherent problems involved while playing Combat, on the other hand, is a complicated affair in comparison, even though it is based on a seemingly straightforward chain of events: initiative, action declaration, calculating defensive values, making offensive actions and then working out if anyone's damaged and to what extent. In execution, this is protracted and involves plenty of calculations, which makes it tricky. Thankfully I should imagine that combat would be infrequent in games of *Noir* – it's more about the threat of violence than the action itself – so this complexity shouldn't overwhelm gaming sessions.

Also included in the rulebook (over and above the definition of the game, the character generation and rules, and the guide to Directing) is a section on The City (broken down into some clichéd districts, such as Chinatown, New Dublin, El Barrio and Little Italy). These descriptions are written in the fictional tongue of someone who lives there, which does add some flavour. Together with the scenario suggestions and some details on important people who live in The City, that's just about the lot.

The most noticeable lack, however, is any thorough advice for referees on running campaigns and coming up with a rationale for a bunch of people getting together and working through some adventures. I should imagine the authors have some ideas on this score – I just wish they'd passed them on. *Noir* is definitely a great idea, but it's also a difficult game to enjoy.

A helping hand

Okay, so the game doesn't actually do it, so why don't we try to do it for you? Try this as a campaign rationale for *Noir*... You may loathe it, but then you may like it – whatever, it's more than you get in the game.

The characters are a bunch of people who worked for a large motor company and have all been laid off because of a series of cut-backs. However, because the company's so large, these ex-employees come from right across the employee spectrum, from the lowliest cleaner to one of the company lawyers. However, one of them's got a secret – he served for one of the board members as an occasional messenger, taking packages to the HQ of another company, and he swears the board member is crooked.

Soon after he makes this revelation to the rest of the 'gang', he's threatened by a thug and told to leave the matter alone. Soon after that he's contacted by an unnamed person who's still 'inside' the company and wants him to help expose the crooked director, starting by intercepting a package and dropping off its contents to an agreed location.

And so begins a series of revelations which lead to the director being discovered as a member of a crime family which is trying to take over the motor industry in The City. The 'gang' has good reason to put this family out of business: hopefully they can gain favour within the motor industry and maybe get their old jobs back again.

VITAL INFO

title:	*Noir*
system:	A roleplaying game
price:	TBA
publisher:	Archon Gaming
	001 847 381 2245
released:	March
e-mail:	archongame@aol.com
web site:	http://www.archongaming.com/

And the players said...

Andy: "I think it's better than Paul makes out – it's got bags of atmosphere."

Gideon: "I got a great character out of it, I'm just not sure where he's headed."

Trenton: "I just wish I'd seen all of the movies it's based on."

Looking elsewhere...

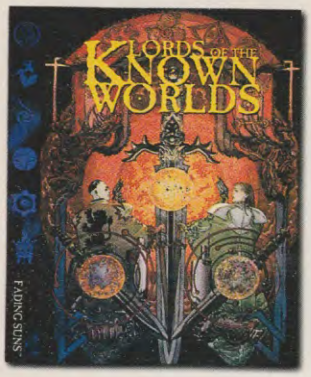
For other movie-inspired games, take a look at (yep, another plug for the Best Game Ever™) *Feng Shui* for its free-flowing style and hard-hitting substance, or perhaps at *Star Wars*, which has bags of background detail and in which the ref gets a very clear idea of what a campaign should be like. And for mean and moody games, pick up a copy of any of the *World of Darkness* titles or *Cyberpunk 2020*.

The Final Verdict

"While the ideas behind *Noir* are completely solid, and there's some fantastic background material on which to base games, it's extremely hard for both the referee and the players alike to make a decent game out of it – it lacks campaign rationale and explanation of what it's supposed to play like. With the right referee and players, it could be incredible."

Paul Pettengale

Score 6/10



Lords of the Known Worlds

Ruling the universe isn't an easy life...

The third sourcebook for Holistic Design's *Fading Suns* science fiction roleplaying system, *Lords of the Known Worlds* takes a close look at nobles in the *Fading Suns* universe.

There are four main 'power-blocks' in the *Fading Suns* setting: the Nobles, the Universal Church, the Merchant League, and the Emperor. Of them, the major Noble Houses are the most influential, and play the largest part in the day-to-day workings of the Known Worlds. Even the Emperor is a noble, and rules only with the consent of the various major and minor Houses.

This makes nobles the movers and shakers in *Fading Suns*, but the neo-feudal government structure means that they have to work hard to maintain and expand their status. *Lords of the Known Worlds* looks at the role and duties of the noble in the Known Worlds, from the viewpoint of player characters and NPCs.

After the obligatory introductory fiction (yet another extract from the journal of Alustro), *Lords of the Known Worlds* gives a brief overview of the concept of the noble in *Fading Suns*, including some new Benefices and Afflictions for noble characters. The rest of the book is then split into chapters covering specific Houses. The major Houses – House Hawkwood, House Decados, The Hazat, House Li Halan, and House al-Malik each get a chapter apiece, while the last two cover the minor Houses and alien nobles respectively.

The chapters dedicated to the major Houses each follow a similar structure. First the history of the House is detailed from its beginnings to the present day. This is followed by a look at the current state of the House and notes on the House's codes of behaviour and outlook. The relations between the House and the other powers of the Known Worlds are then examined, along with summaries of the House's holdings and important personages. Finally, there are notes on roleplaying members of the House, often accompanied by new Benefices and Afflictions unique or common to that House.

The last two chapters follow a similar structure, although there's much less detail given. Scattered throughout the book are a number of rules additions, including a new 'race' – the heavily-modified Kossack troops of House Decados – and some new combat options. Likewise, each chapter also includes several short ideas for adventures involving the House or Race in some way. On top of that, the whole book is packed full of inspiration for noble-based adventures and campaigns.

Lords of the Known Worlds is yet another solid, well-produced sourcebook for *Fading Suns*, maintaining the equally high standard of previous releases. It forms a perfect complement to the *Byzantium Secundus* sourcebook (**arcane** 15), fleshing out the noble Houses that play such a critical role in the politics of the Empire.

Also like *Byzantium Secundus*, the book is best suited to political campaigns where social interaction is emphasised over physical combat and adventure. However, it does have more to offer even the most action-packed of campaigns, because nobles make both excellent player characters and NPC patrons.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

VITAL INFO

A sourcebook for Fading Suns £11.99
Holistic Design
001 770 934 8434
Out now
hdi@mindspring.com
http://www.holistic-design.com/

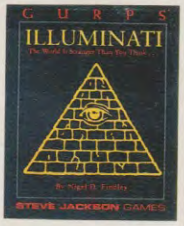
GURPS Illuminati

It's not just the truth that's out there. There's the orbital mind-control lasers, FNORD, M.I.B.s. The Knights Templar and the Gnomes of Zurich...

Oh yes, higher-than-high weirdness awaits around every corner in this *GURPS* worldbook, a welcome reprinting of the late Nigel D. Findley's *GURPS Illuminati*.

For those of you unfamiliar with Steve Jackson Games' original *Illuminati* boardgame and subsequent CCG, the world presented in this particular supplement is a slightly warped version of our own, where each strange occurrence and random event is inextricably linked to The Global Conspiracy – who's behind it?

It could be the Boy Scouts or the Alphans, time-travelling meddlers from the distant future, or even something mundane like the government... In *GURPS Illuminati*, what you read in the tabloids is true, and there's enough strange stuff around to give Fox Mulder nightmares. Tongue firmly in its cheek, Findley's book is a fabulous resource for devious referees of every stripe.



GURPS Illuminati
A sourcebook for *GURPS*
£11.95
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out now

Packed with double and triple-think conspiracies and plots nested inside each other like infinite sets of Russian dolls, it's almost a manual for 'How To Drive Your Players Insane'.

Primarily, the *Illuminati* campaign is centred around a group of truth-seeking PCs who've uncovered some element of the greater web of intrigue around them, but the broad scope of The Conspiracy as a campaign thread is interchangeable with almost any roleplaying universe, and the book provides a few good examples. While unsuitable for the more superficial, hack 'n' slash style of gaming, *GURPS Illuminati* is the perfect tool to tune up or inspire roleplay with a lot of head-work.

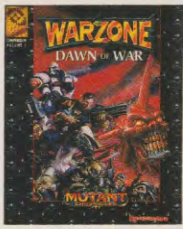
The irreverent tone is *GURPS* writing at its best, full of ideas skewed just enough that you're unsure if you should laugh or start sweeping the room for bugs...

Jim Swallow Score 9/10

Dawn of War

This is the first in a potentially long line of supplements for the *Warzone* science fiction wargame, which is based in the same universe as the *Mutant Chronicles* RPG. It takes the opportunity to tidy up some of the ropier sections of the mother game, such as close combat.

Like the main book, this supplement breezes along nicely with simple additions to the rules that, while they'll undoubtedly complicate the issue, won't gum up the works. Being a compendium of rules, it certainly is an ambitious book that covers lots of ground and fills in plenty of detail.



Dawn of War
A supplement for *Warzone*
£8.99
Heartbreaker
001 608 242 5455
Out now

New forces and weaponry are introduced for every army, including paramedics and new AI units. Particularly exciting is the drafting in of special personalities from the *Mutant Chronicles* roleplaying game that beef up the existing armies and add a touch of distinctiveness.

Characters, such as Cardinal Dominic, always give battles a focus, while the Mishiman kamikaze personalities are marvellously ironic and a hell of a laugh. Thankfully they're also backed up by a superb range of new figures.

The new official and optional rules that pad out the main game are patchy. Some are a bit bland such as the AI additions; some are vague or over-complicated such as the indirect fire and clubbing rules, while yet others are spot on such as the sweep attack and anti-sniper moves. Close combat has been extensively reworked for the better with parries and counter-charges, as well as other clarifications that come as a relief.

Anyone who counts *Warzone* among their pursuits should be able to put this book to good use. My only reservation is that, by trying to cover so many forces evenly, some of the ideas are given scant regard. I feel future supplements should specialise.

Mark Donald Score 7/10

Operation Dry Dock

The first of two supplements for *Silent Death* this month, *Operation Dry Dock* is a collection of ships for ICE's space combat game.

The book serves two purposes. First of all, it updates many of the original *Silent Death* ships and offers a number of variants on them. Secondly, it details the composition of the space fleets maintained by the Twelve – the governments that have sprung up since the fall of the Empire.

Operation Dry Dock
A supplement for *Silent Death*
£9.50
ICE
001 800 325 0479
Out now

The vast bulk of the 92-page book is taken up with descriptions and ship displays of the various ships – updated versions of the original 26 craft, together with 23

The book is set apart from its predecessors in its presentation, style and atmosphere. Last year the *Kult* line abandoned its familiar house style in favour of an avant-garde approach to design that works well here. The interior text is clear, punctuated with effective, black and white art. The gatefold cover is matt black with a plain title in gold lettering that wears off if you treat it roughly. The interior gatefold includes a most disturbing disclaimer: "This is a game" it states with Magritte-like irony. I dearly hope it is, especially given the gruesome sketches of a medical procedure on the facing page!

The storyline brings the PCs to Spain, thanks to a mutual acquaintance who stands to inherit a small fortune. Whereas previous scenarios have introduced the supernatural swiftly and brutally, *The Judas Grail* is comparatively subtle about it. Indeed, the investigation is slow-paced, obscure and at times tenuous with several dead-ends. The players will need information contacts built into their PCs or they will find it heavy going. Another criticism is that certain vital scenes and information are glossed over, which should pose no problem for an inventive ref, but are irritating omissions nevertheless. The worst of these concerns the adventure's aftermath, which is not even addressed. Ultimately, *The Judas Grail* has moments of great horror potential that too often go unrealised.

The Judas Grail
A scenario for *Kult*
£10.75
Target Games/Metropolis
0151 207 3737
Out now

Lucya Szachnowski Score 6/10

Middle-earth: The Dragons Player's Guide

The latest strategy guide for ICE's *Middle-earth* collectable card game, the *Middle-earth: The Dragons Player's Guide* concentrates its attention on the *Dragons* expansion set, and the changes and additions it made to the game.

The book is split into three parts. The first is the actual strategy guide itself, which covers a wide variety of topics, and includes card errata, notes on new playing styles, and several complete pre-designed decks, along with discussions of their strengths and weaknesses.

The shorter second section then provides full lists of all the cards in the *Dragons* set, organised by type. Finally, the bulk of the book is taken up by a card-by-card discussion of the entire expansion set. Each card is pictured, along with notes and hints on its strengths, weaknesses, and best uses. Unfortunately, while this section undoubtedly looks impressive, well over half of the text is actually short fiction based on the card portrayed – the hard information alone would have taken up far less space.

Nonetheless, *Middle-earth: The Dragons Player's Guide* is still exceptionally comprehensive, and a marked improvement over the similar book aimed at *Middle-earth: The Wizards*. There is a lot of useful and insightful advice on both playing the game and designing decks, and any serious *Middle-earth* fan would be well advised to take a look. Casual players, though, can easily do without this.

Middle-earth: The Dragons Player's Gui
A strategy guide for *Me:TD*
£6.95
ICE
001 800 325 04
Out now

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

Adventures on the High Seas

There's something about high-seas adventures that bring out the pirate – and the ham actor – in every roleplayer. Aaarrr… hoist the Jolly Roger and break out the rum!

The second edition of *Adventures on the High Seas*, a sourcebook for the *Palladium Fantasy* RPG, contains lots of info on seafaring occupational character classes, boats, ship-to-ship combat plus geographical details of seas, islands and ports.

Adventures on the High Seas
A sourcebook for *Palladium Fantasy*
£11.99
Palladium
001 313 946 2900
Out now

All of this is well-researched. Are there any prizes for spotting the in-house joke in the naming of the Bizantium town of 'Wujik' – renowned for its stench?

Numerous scenarios and adventure hooks are seeded throughout. Most of the islands have a mystery to be solved, treasure to be found or a political situation to deal with. The plots are variable in style, difficulty and originality. In the first adventure, the party gets shipwrecked on an island ruled by women.

The assumption seems to be that the player characters will be male and want to escape servitude. It also states that all the priestesses are celibate, then mentions a high priestess and her husband. Ho hum…

Nevertheless, the supplement is a useful reference for anyone wanting to run a sea-based campaign. It is packed with information and is good value for money. The main difference between this edition and the earlier one is a new cover, new interior art, some extra info and modifications to incorporate changes in the second edition *Palladium Fantasy* RPG rules.

Lucya Szachnowski Score 7/10

Charnel Houses of Europe: The Shoah

can roleplaying deal with a subject as serious as the Holocaust?

For a medium that has existed for several decades, roleplaying has changed precious little. So, it's a shock to the system to encounter a work that addresses the single most horrific human action this century – the Holocaust.

The opening spread sets the tone for the book. A lone ferryman and his raft carry two concentration camp victims across the River of Death. Untold thousand more throng the bank, and above it all the words 'never again' hang.

The book exudes such emotion, but not in a calculated, push-the-right-buttons manner. The telling of the events, and the description of their effects in *Wraith's* Shadowlands is often little more than statement of fact, with little literary embellishment. But that just lets the stark nightmare of the truth stand out all the more.

The book splits into five sections. The first tells the history of the Holocaust, in the sort of detail that you would never have wished to know, but, in a way, you are glad you do. *World of Darkness* diversions from real history are marked off in sidebars.

The remaining four sections detail, as settings for present day *Wraith* games, sites of real world atrocities that have become haunts for the predominantly Jewish victims of the camps.

Consistency with the established parameters of *Wraith* is scrupulously kept to. Extremely violent and horrific death has been established as the cause of the newly dead being immediately reborn as Spectres. Many of the concentration camps' victims are said to have done just that. Indeed, there is no attempt to portray the situation in black and white terms, but in the many shades of grey that existed in the camps.

It is hard to leave behind the sheer emotional reaction this book produces, and just analyse it as a supplement. But, perhaps, that is itself something to praise *Charnel Houses* for. The horror of the holocaust is woven into every section of it, right down to the character descriptions and stats.

In 15 years of roleplaying, I have been entertained, amused and excited by various sourcebooks, and most of the time those emotions have been transferred to my games. Never in those years has a supplement moved me as much as this. And never have I been so inspired to try to replicate that in a game.

In balancing the emotion with the facts and yet still providing an effortlessly usable supplement, White Wolf has produced a masterpiece. Whether you feel the slaughter of millions is suitable fare for a game is up to you. I for one applaud this first step into adulthood for roleplaying.

Adam Tinworth Score 9/10

VITAL INFO
A sourcebook for *Wraith: The Oblivion*
£8.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now
http://www.white-wolf.com

Missions

Designed to tie in with the recently-released *Shadowrun Companion* (**arcane** 16), *Missions* is a collection of four adventures, all of which make use of the new rules, options, and alternate campaign styles featured in the *Companion*.

There are four adventures in the book and each is based around a different campaign background. The first, *Under the Influence*, casts the players as Lone Star detectives on the trail of a well-equipped street gang. *Malpractice*, on the other hand, sees the players taking on the roles of DocWagon security specialists defending an ambulance from attack.

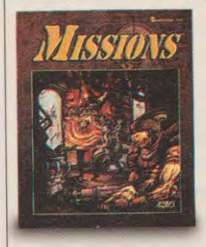
In *Mission: Mars* the players are either a corporate security team or journalists, seeking the truth behind the pictures in Dunkelzhan's will. In the last of the four, *King of the Mountain*, the players are a crack UCAS Military Special Forces team, attempting to deal with a mad paramilitary leader.

All the adventures are of a fairly high standard, with some interesting ideas and clever twists. Because of their length they do tend to be a little linear, but it doesn't take much fleshing-out to get over this problem.

The only real drawback to *Missions* is the fact that the four adventures are unconnected and are designed for radically different teams of characters. It doesn't take too much work to adapt them to a 'standard' team of shadowrunners, but then this rather defeats the point – the adventures are designed to highlight the differences between normal *Shadowrun* and the various campaign backgrounds possible. Because of this, most referees are only going to get limited use out this book in actual play.

Nonetheless, there are plenty of ideas here, many of which are adaptable to a wide range of games. Not a 'must have', then, but interesting stuff all the same.

Missions
A collection of adventures for *Shadowrun*
£8.99
FASA
001 312 243 5660
Out now



Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Beyond the Boundaries

Kult's conjurors' guides take real-world magical systems, edit them so that players won't find themselves enacting genuine rituals, and warp the whole lot into something far darker than even Aleister Crowley would have concocted. No wonder *Kult* once won an award as the game most likely to make the moral majority say: 'Jesus Christ!'

The problem with magic in the main rulebook was that the five paths of magic were covered rather unsatisfactorily – a description and limited spell list for each. *Beyond the Boundaries* goes into two paths – the Lore of Death and the Lore of Time and Space – in great depth, striking an excellent balance between simplicity of system and ample information. The guide also includes useful character templates plus an overview of the way magic works in the *Kult* system and background.

Beyond the Boundaries
A sourcebook for *Kult*
£10.99
Target Games/ Metropolis Ltd
0151 207 3737
Out Now

Essentially, the world we know is an illusion; magic can break the illusion and eventually allow humans to become gods. The practice of magic also drives its practitioners insane. Think *Videodrome*, *Hellraiser* or *Seven* to get an idea of the intended effect.

The basic problem with *Beyond the Boundaries* is just that it is difficult to read. The type used is incredibly small and is printed over highly intrusive background images. This is almost certainly by design rather than by accident, because the production quality throughout is high, with plenty of photographs and colour. Some pages have a gold tint – which presumably accounts for the high retail price.

Don't be put off by the small print, though. It is worth persevering, even if you need an eye-test after!

Lucya Szachnowski Score 7/10

Heart, Mind & Soul

Heart, Mind & Soul is another magic supplement for *Kult*, this time covering the Lores of Passion, Dreams and Madness. This silver-covered book is similar in layout and design to *Beyond the Boundaries* but, although it uses the same small type size, it is much easier to read simply because the background images are less intrusive.

The general material at the start of *Heart, Mind & Soul* repeats information in the first section of *Beyond The Boundaries*. This is useful if you don't have the other volume, but most *Kult* referees are going to need to buy both. It seems a shame that Target Games didn't simply produce a single volume on magic with everything from both books.

As in the other volume, the writing style is perfect, with a mixture of short stories for flavour, extensive information on the different paths of magic, character templates and detailed descriptions of each spell – right down to the necessary preparations, invocations, gestures and visualisations. There's so much detail you could even use it as live action – if you have the stomach for it!

The only disappointing part of this supplement is the coverage of

Starblade Battalion

save the universe in a *mekton zeta/cyberpunk* crossover campaign...

After several months of quiet, R Talsorian's Japanese *anime* giant robot roleplaying game, *Mekton Zeta*, bounds back into the fray with a brand new campaign supplement in the form of *Starblade Battalion*. As we've come to expect from the *Mekton* writing team, *Starblade* is a dyed-in-the-wool *anime* rollercoaster ride, true to its origins and packed with loads of potential.

RTG has made the bold step of joining this particular *Mekton* 'universe' with its popular *Cyberpunk* RPG, extrapolating the *Starblade* world from the dark future of the 2020s, and the central themes and motifs of *Starblade Battalion* carry a lot of the same feel – both games are in worlds where huge events thunder around over the characters' heads, and only they can stand between the powerful forces that seek to crush them.

Circa 2180, the *Starblade* world has humankind divided into two major powers. On Earth, the United Stellar States Alliance, headed by the militant Gaian Circle ecologists, seeks to reign in the outer worlds and impose restrictive laws, while in the star systems of the Pleiades Cluster, the Confederation (led by the colossal Solingen Corporation) is aiming for total and unrestricted expansion across space. With swords drawn and governments butting heads, the cold war between the USSA and the Pleiades turns hot – and it's here that the players find themselves, embroiled in a conflict that no one wants and no one can win.

With both sides unwilling to back down, it's up to a third force to tip the balance – and that's where the Starblade Battalion comes in. Made up of renegades, pirates, defectors and of course, the PCs, the Battalion is given a remit to stop the spiral into total war and expose the hidden agendas on both sides.

Starblade Battalion is very finely drawn, providing a dense and workable world to take inspiration from. Unlike previous *Mekton* books, there are no overt goodies or baddies and no intractable alien threats – instead, both sides in the war are presented as realistic forces driven by their leaders to fight a just war for the wrong reasons, and the first two sections of the book cover them in depth.

There's a strong stylistic influence from RTG's *Cyberpunk* line, here, and it plays well, carrying you through the development of the 'back story' by the simple device of log entries and filling occasional side-bars with NPC notes and data.

Ready-made jump-off points for campaigns are provided on both sides, in addition to the *Starblade* option, and a smattering of new gear (including mecha, starships, weapons and cyberware) fills out the shopping list for character generation.

Previous *Mekton* world books, such as *Operation Rimfire* and *Invasion Terra*, have relied on the use of pre-generated characters to move the storyline along, but *Starblade Battalion* eschews this approach to provide outline PC 'classes' and a few pointers. Along with three short scenarios, the book gives good value for money and is the best background yet for the game – and it's still ripe for expansion via more sourcebooks.

Jim Swallow Score 8/10

VITAL INFO

Starblade Battalion
A sourcebook for *Mekton*
£9.50
R.Talsorian Games
001 510 549 1373
Out now
rtg@best.com
http://www.best.com/~rtg1/

Clanbook: Ravnos

The division of The Kindred into clans has given *Vampire* much of its character, but it has also often been something of a liability. All too frequently, clans are defined by stereotypes – Nosferatu are ugly outsiders, Gangrel are animalistic loners and so on – which restrict roleplaying choices somewhat and make it fairly difficult to integrate members of different clans into one group.

The best of the Clanbooks are undoubtedly those that flesh out or confound the stereotypes – these offer a wealth of information that is not available elsewhere, as well as providing guidelines on how to incorporate clan members into a roleplaying campaign.

Clanbook: Ravnos succeeds on all counts, providing a much-needed depth to the previously ill-defined cliché of the loveable gypsy rogue. Their history and culture are still tied closely to those of the gypsy or Rom, but with a rich flavour and detail that raises them above mere tricksters and thieves.

They have their own tradition of freedom and family, and they follow their own laws while refusing to recognise those of others. This tradition offers a solid background for Ravnos but fortunately does not stifle choice, because most modern clan members are of non-gypsy stock and offer a wide choice of roleplaying opportunities, many of which are outlined here. There are also much needed suggestions on why fiercely independent Ravnos would co-operate with others.

Packed with lots of new information on Ravnos legend and history, the different gypsy families, Ravnos justice and additional abilities and disciplines, this book is essential if you want to do justice to Ravnos characters. With the usual high-quality artwork and an entertaining and easy-to-read style, this is yet another winner from White Wolf. Bring on the Giovannis!

Mark Barter Score 8/10

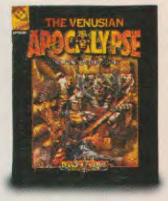
Clanbook: Ravnos
A sourcebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*
£5.99
White Wolf
001 404 292 1819
Out now

The Second Seal of Repulsion

For most roleplaying games, dedicated adventures are fast becoming something of a rarity, with the obvious exception of TSR, which continues to churn out *AD&D* scenarios at a rate of knots while most other games companies seem to be shying away from them.

Which makes *The Second Seal of Repulsion* a pleasant surprise. It's the first part of a trilogy of adventures for Heartbreaker's *Mutant Chronicles* science fiction roleplaying game, collectively called *The Venusian Apocalypse* (the second part, *The Four Riders*, is also reviewed below – look out for the final chapter, *Beyond the Pale*, next month).

The Second Seal of Repulsion starts with the players being hired to perform what appears to be nothing more than a simple recon mission in the jungles of Venus. Of course things aren't that simple, and the players quickly find themselves up to the neck in events of universe-shattering proportions – events which they may unwittingly have started.



The Second Seal of Repulsion
An adventure for *Mutant Chronicles*
£5.95
Heartbreaker
001 608 242 5455
Out now

The book is split into three chapters, each of which details all the important events and plot lines for that part of the adventure, complete with notes on getting the players involved and so on. The writing is clear and easy to follow, and full stats and special rules are provided throughout in the relevant places.

In fact, the only real problem with *The Second Seal of Repulsion* is the lack of a detailed overview of the entire plot for the referee. Only by reading the book through a few times can you become familiar with what's actually going on and what's likely to happen in the next installments.

Other that, this is a well-designed adventure with a pleasantly large scope.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

The Four Riders

And here's the second part of *The Venusian Apocalypse* trilogy of adventures for Heartbreaker's *Mutant Chronicles* science fiction roleplaying game, which begins with *The Second Seal of Repulsion* (above). Interestingly, the adventure has been designed in such a way that the group need not have played through the events of the first scenario, although the referee does need to be familiar with events that have already occurred.

In this part of the story, the players will begin to realise the true scale of the situation they've been caught up in. Having been unwitting accomplices to the unleashing of an ancient evil powerful enough to threaten all humanity, they now find themselves racing against time both to prove their own innocence and to save the planet of Venus from a plague more deadly than any seen before. If they fail, however, all life on the lush jungle world will be dead within weeks.

This is a slightly better adventure than *The Second Seal*, mainly because the players can have a far greater impact on what actually happens in the plot. It's split into three chapters, as with the first adventure, and benefits from the same quality of writing and organised sections. It still suffers, though, from the lack of a detailed overview of the story.

Although it is possible to play through this without having previously finished *The Second Seal of Repulsion*,

Dresda

Alternative Armies loses the gunpowder plot.

Dresda is a rough-and-ready miniatures wargame system that concerns itself with knockabout skirmishes in a fantasy setting. This world apart is known as Valon – a brutish arena where Dwarves and Elves, Orcs and Goblins, along with good old Man, insist on getting medieval on one another.

Anyone familiar with the *Flintloque* gunpowder skirmish system will be instantly at home in Valon. *Dresda* is organised on fairly similar lines and occupies a slightly ambiguous time-line that's been carefully blurred to allow for overlap between the two systems. Thus, although *Flintloque* players can go the whole hog and replace gun-point with stick-point, there's no reason at all why they can't recreate some of the famous massacres of spear chuckers at the hands of more explosively inclined modern armies.

The main difference between *Dresda* and *Flintloque* lies in the campaign system. *Dresda* is not concerned with standing armies but with disorganised mobs that must be first recruited and then induced to hang about when events turn nasty. Units must be maintained from battle to battle by the careful use of cash bonuses, toys, performance-related pay, not killing them – that sort of thing.

Wargamers new to the world of Valon should consider the fact that the battles are only half the story in *Dresda*. This is not a game of abstract one-off brawls, where two evenly matched armies line up in the middle of a field and bosh each other senseless. No. The idea is for players to develop their forces over a series of battles, designing scenarios that are slightly more elaborate than 'last man standing', that can cope with uneven sides, and take into account your war party's aims and sensibilities as evolved through the campaign. For example, a band of Hobgoblin bandits is unlikely to have the same ambitions as the Halfling militia. Be advised that a GM is a recommended *Dresda* accessory.

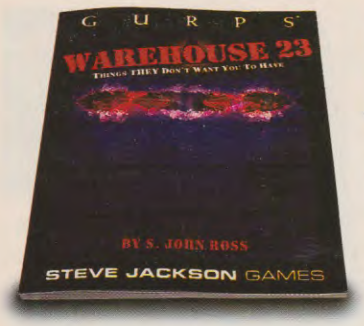
Thankfully the campaign system of raising and maintaining your troops is fairly sensible and lightweight. It sticks to generic types (Ratmen and Ogres and so on), further dividing them into mercenaries or regulars or what have you, depending on racial adaptability. Throw in an armoury and some experience and injury rules and it shouldn't be difficult to have several warbands on the go at once. It's fast and simple.

The same cannot be said of combat. This is partly a consequence of the skirmish nature of the game. With no more than a dozen models a side per affray you'd expect a fair amount of detail, but the percentile system makes matters complex and close combat becomes a morass of modifiers that will dredge up your childhood fears of arithmetic.

The designers make no real apology for this, because they maintain that their role ended once the basic framework of the game was in place. Because of this, *Dresda* is full of gaps which it is down to your group to fill in. With limited reference you'll have your work cut out.

Mark Donald Score 5/10

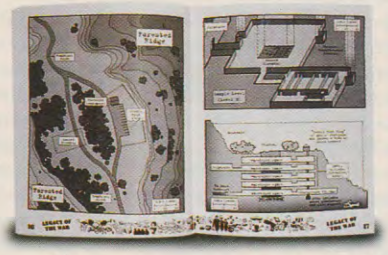
VITAL INFO
A fantasy skirmish wargame
£19.95
Alternative Armies
01563 520222
Out now



GURPS Warehouse 23

where do they hide the secrets?

Remember the closing scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where the crate containing the Ark of the Covenant is put into storage in a vast government warehouse? What else is sitting on those shelves, hidden away from the world at large? The answers are in *Warehouse 23* – the latest sourcebook for Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS* roleplaying system. Or at least some of the answers.



Warehouse 23 is the place where the secrets They don't want Us to know about are hidden. Using this idea as a framework, the book goes on to catalogue a wide variety of 'modern myths' and the truth that lurks behind them.

VITAL INFO

A sourcebook for *GURPS*
£11.95
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 447 7866
Out now
sjg@io.com
http://www.io.com/sjgames/

The 128-page book is split into six sections. The first, Legacy of the War, presents the 'default' history of the warehouse, complete with notes on a couple of important NPCs as well as maps of the building and so on. The second section, Alternate Warehouses, takes a broader look at the concept of a secret storage facility in a variety of settings.

The default setting for *Warehouse 23* is assumed to be similar to that of *GURPS Illuminati* (see review this issue), where pretty much *every* conspiracy theory is at least a 'little bit true', but this chapter discusses how a different setting will change the warehouse's contents, ownership, secrecy and so on.

The next three sections of the book are then concerned with the contents of the warehouse itself. Gallery of the Strange describes a wide variety of items and knowledge, many of which have become part of popular culture over the past few years. Included are descriptions and background notes on everything from the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Grail and the Spear of Destiny to the aborted Martian invasion of the early '30s and the truth behind the Men In Black of UFO folklore. The Cryptozoo, on the other hand, looks at living creatures, from 'lost' dinosaurs to the Yeti.

The fifth section, Odds Unbeatable and Grisly Ends, skims through the vast variety of other things that might be found in the warehouse. It includes some new skills and the details of technologies particularly favoured by the heads of The Conspiracy, and it also looks at using Warehouse 23 in different genres. Finally, in section six, there's an illuminated time-line that integrates just about every conspiracy theory ever proposed.

Warehouse 23 is a great book, packed to bursting with inspiration and scenario ideas. The research that's obviously been done into the 'real' things is enhanced by an easy-going, vaguely tongue-in-cheek style of writing that makes it fun to read.

Although it's obviously the perfect complement to *GURPS Illuminati*, its appeal is far from limited to that specific setting – there's a lot here that could fit into any conspiracy, horror, superhero or pulp campaign.

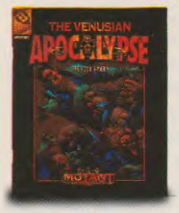
The idea of the warehouse itself is excellent, but even if you don't use the place as a whole, the vast array of secrets presented is fascinating in itself. Excellent stuff.

Andy Butcher Score 8/10

The Four Riders does benefit from the sense of continuity gained by playing both scenarios in order.

So another well designed adventure from *Mutant Chronicles*, and one that meshes well with the first part of the story. Provided the last installment is as good as these, *The Venusian Apocalypse* will prove to be a worthwhile purchase for most *Mutant Chronicles* referees.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

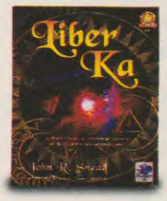


The Four Riders
An adventure for *Mutant Chronicles*
£5.95
Heartbreaker
001 608 242 5455
Out now

Liber Ka

Most supplements for RPGs expand on the basic rules provided by the core rulebook. It's not often that one comes along that replaces the original system – but that's exactly what *Liber Ka* attempts.

Liber Ka presents roleplayers with an alternative sorcery system for Chaosium's *Nephilim* roleplaying game. The new system completely replaces the old one – and is radically different in many ways – but remains completely compatible with the rest of the *Nephilim* rules, and even with the character generation system.



Liber Ka
A supplement for *Nephilim*
£9.95
Chaosium
001 510 547 7681
Out now

What makes *Liber Ka* even more interesting are its claims to be based upon the 'real' magic of the Western occult tradition.

The book itself is split into three parts. The first two are background chapters, introducing the concepts of the new system in the form of two extracts: one from a book describing the history of sorcery, the other is part of an article about modern practices.

The third part is the largest, and contains the meat of the book in the form of the new sorcery system. In line with 'modern thinking' about sorcery, the bulk of the new system revolves around complex rituals which, when performed correctly, will result in a desired effect being achieved without any obvious magical influence in the real world – a ritual designed to kill, for example, might result in the unfortunate target dying in a car crash.

Whether or not *Liber Ka* will be to your liking is largely a matter of taste. If you have no problem with basing elements of a roleplaying game on 'real' occult practice, you'll probably enjoy this. It's certainly an interesting alternative to the basic *Nephilim* sorcery rules.

On the other hand, if this kind of thing offends you, stay clear. Although if this kind of game does offend you, it's probably best to stay clear of *Nephilim* itself as well.

Andy Butcher Score 6/10

Universal Night Watch

Second of the latest releases for *Silent Death* this month, *Universal Night Watch* covers every aspect of the elite space combat organisation of the title, including new weapons and ships, a detailed background, and new scenarios.

Universal Night Watch
A sourcebook for *Silent Death*
£9.50
ICE
001 800 325 0479
Out now

Universal Night Watch is a special military unit created by the Twelve for the express purpose of defending human space from the forces of the Night Brood. Drawing together the best-trained pilots and technicians, a range of new technology, and experience gained from the first great war against the grubs, Universal Night Watch is a formidable group.

Once the background and formation of the Night Watch has been described, the book moves on to the new technology developed to fight against the grubs. This includes several new weapons systems, added defences against Spore Moles, and several new advances in ship design and squadron tactics. All of these give the UNW a much-needed edge against the impressive ships of the Night Brood. Each is explained clearly, following the same style as previous additions to the game.

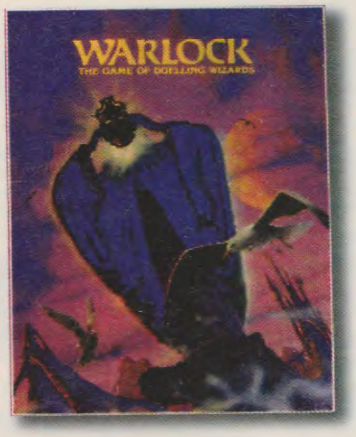
After the new tech you get details of the UNW units, squadron by squadron. This is followed by no less than 12 complete scenarios featuring UNW forces. Finally the new ships are described, complete with new ship displays. As well as six new human fighters, a new escort ship and two new grub vessels, there are also details of a number of UNW upgrades to existing ships, ranging from minor tweaks to fairly major alterations.

In all, then, a well-conceived and professionally-produced supplement, with a lot to offer the *Silent Death* player. Provided you're into human v grub battles, that is.

Andy Butcher Score 7/10

Warlock

A card game of duelling wizards that wouldn't set you back more than £7.50? Fantasy, surely? Dan Joyce reckons not.



Published by Games Workshop in 1980, about £7.50 for the boxed set

MAGIC: THE GATHERING may have hit the jackpot, but card games about duelling wizards are far from new. Back in 1980, when *White Dwarf* only ran articles about *AD&D* and *Traveller* – and occasionally *RuneQuest* – Games Workshop produced a shiny new boardgame by the name of *Warlock*.

The board itself, however, was utterly redundant. All you really needed were the big pile of spell cards and the cross-referenced spell-effect charts. With these you could summon your Goblins, cast Thunderbolts, whatever, and resolve the results satisfactorily.

Here's how you played: you decided whether you'd play a Black wizard or a White wizard; you drew a hand of seven spell cards (one a turn thereafter); you announced whether you'd be duelling or not this round. If you were, you then attempted, in an orderly fashion, to blast any other wizards standing into Limbo (it was a 2-6 player game).

Limbo didn't mean death. It meant the loss of more energy points. Energy points were expended on casting spells, forfeited for not participating in a duel, and lost in spades if you got zapped into Limbo. You gained energy points by successfully banishing other wizards to Limbo. If you ran out of energy points, you were out of the game. Last wizard standing won.

The range of spells was your typical fantasy fare. You could attack directly (Thunderbolt, Gorgon's Stare, Canon, etc) or you could summon things to fight for you (Goblins, Magic Swords, etc). Spell combat was resolved by the charts. You cross referenced the attack spell with the defending spell. Sometimes you'd counter the other spell; Light countered Darkness, a Force Field countered a Thunderbolt. Sometimes you could reflect the spell back at the caster; a Mirrored Shield did this to a Gorgon's Stare.

Creature combat was like *Magic*'s, only simpler. The creature with the highest strength won. You could even join the fray yourself, though you'd need a Magic Sword of some kind to stand any chance of not being pasted by even the lowliest creature.

Creatures could also be taken out with spells – turning Trolls to stone by casting Light, for instance, or blowing away those Goblins with a Canon. The spell charts handled all this.

So far, so not very different from *Magic*. Except, of course, there were no mana sources – spells just cost 'energy'. In *Magic* terms, it would be like all spells costing Life to cast. And there were only two colours (Black and White) rather than five.

The point about having Black and White wizards was that some spells were cheaper certain wizards. A White wizard could summon a Saint more cheaply than a Black wizard; a Black wizard could cast Darkness more cheaply, and so on. Black and White wizards also cast their own spells more effectively. They drew from the same pool of spells, though, and used the same cards.

This is the crucial difference from *Magic*: all the wizards drew from a common pool of cards. There were only, say, 300 spell cards, and many were duplicates. So you always had a rough idea of the options your opponent had. Sure, he might throw down a Mirrored Shield at an unexpected moment, but he'd never throw down a card you'd never seen before, or only vaguely heard of.

Since there was a common pool of cards, you couldn't build a deck. You just drew a random hand. You might get good cards, you might get bad cards. Tough break. You couldn't stack the odds in your favour. You couldn't customise your playing style. The hand you got dealt was entirely down to chance. These are the key reasons why *Warlock* never really took off. It wasn't collectible, and you couldn't customise it.

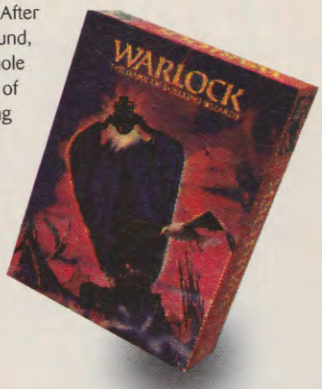
There were other reasons, but they're relatively minor. Play was simpler. You just took it in turns to cast an offensive spell, and when it wasn't your turn you could only cast a spell to defend yourself. And that was it. There were no stages. So there was no suddenly Giant Growthing your Scryb Sprites after your opponent had decided not to block them, and no picking off your opponent's weenie creatures with a Prodigal Sorcerer.

There were no cards on the table, either, other than the ones that had just been cast. After you cast your Trolls, they didn't stick around, they vanished. Which meant that the whole environment of the game was simpler – sort of like two blue/red counter/burn decks playing one another.

Warlock wasn't a bad game. It was quick, it was easy, games only lasted half an hour or so, and you could play it with two people as easily as with six. I quite liked it, but it never became anything more than a way to kill time while waiting for someone to turn up for the roleplaying game that we were running that day.

Then again, maybe that's actually a good thing.

"Spells just cost 'energy'. In Magic terms, it would be like all spells costing Life to cast. And there were only two colours (Black and White) rather than five."



COSMIC

Warlock isn't the only game that has strong similarities with *Magic. Cosmic Encounter*, which spawned numerous expansion sets, isn't so different either.

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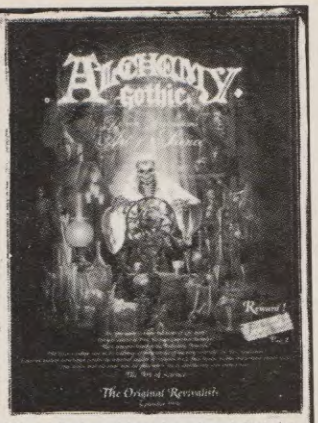

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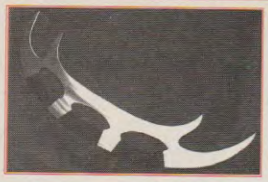

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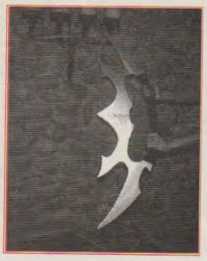

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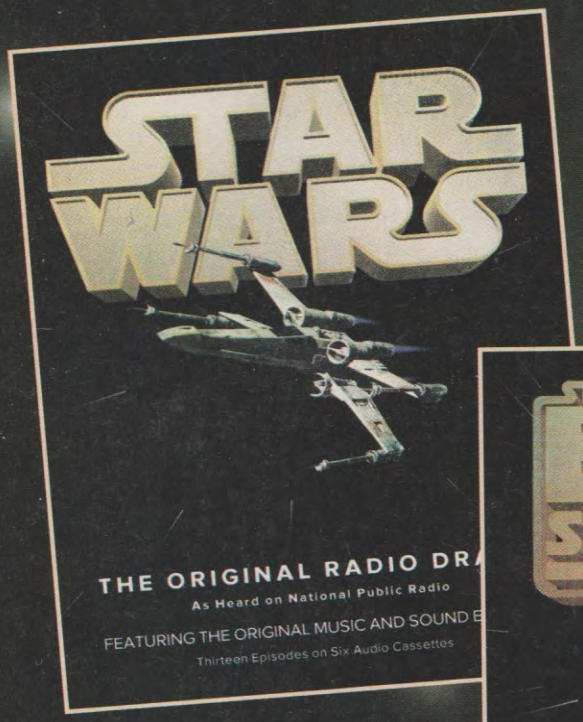
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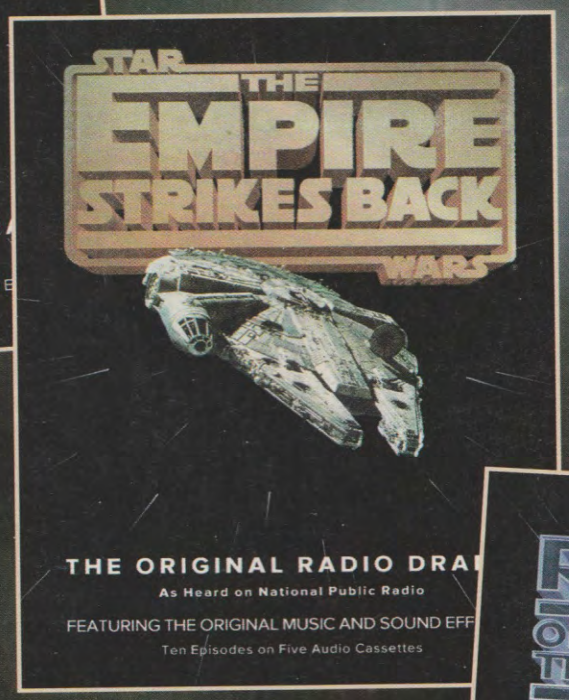
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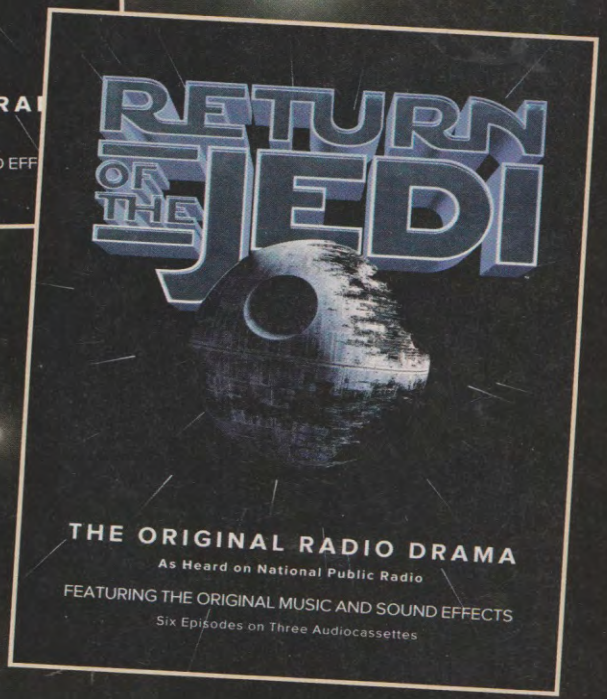
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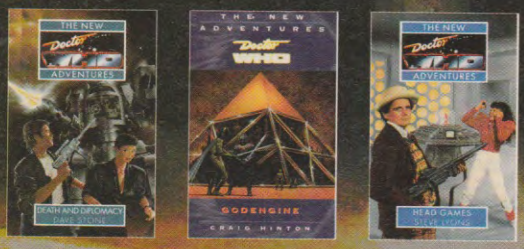

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the roleplaying magazine arcane SOURCE MATERIAL ESSENTIAL INFO!

The Uplift Trilogy

Believable non-humans, a dramatic setting, hard science... David Brin's sci-fi trilogy has it all, reckons Dan Joyce.

Novels

Before you run a sci-fi game like *Traveller* you need to do some homework. Sitting in front of *Star Wars* with a bag of popcorn will suffice, but I'd advise a good read-through of David Brin's Uplift trilogy too. The three books, *Sundiver*, *Startide Rising*, and *The Uplift War*, have all the elements for a successful campaign. Steve Jackson Games knows this already; it turned the trilogy into a sourcebook. That's out of print, but the books are still available.

The Setting

In many sci-fi settings humanity is at the centre of everything. Brin turns this notion of man as master of the universe on its head. In his trilogy, man is the newest and most ignorant star-faring race, only brought to the attention of the rest of galactic society when one of our slower-than-light ships blundered into an area of 'occupied' space.

All alien races have been 'uplifted' – genetically and culturally modified so that their animal (or in some cases plant) forms gain sentience. This tradition dates back to time immemorial, and status within galactic society is dependent on the client races an older race has brought to sentience. Humanity gains instant status by default, because by this time Brin figures we have carried out experiments on chimpanzees and dolphins to improve their brains.

Humanity bucks the galactic trend in having no obvious forefathers, however. This causes resentment in Brin's rigid alien society. Humans are an anomaly, a challenge the 'natural order'.

Few races actively like humanity, and all have vastly superior technology at their disposal. Man is the underdog in a predominantly hostile universe. It's an idea that works well dramatically, for the same kind of reason that it's more satisfying to roleplay a resistance fighter than an oppressor. Brin just ups the ante by putting the whole human race at the sharp end, rather than a group of humans (which is what *Star Wars* does).

Roleplaying opportunities in a universe like this aren't restricted to boldly going to new worlds (which smacks of 'let's go on an adventure'). Many sessions will be a matter of survival. But because man is out-gunned by everyone, this doesn't mean endless armed confrontations. The players will have to out-think the opposition, as the characters in Brin's novels do.

In Brin's case, humans have one ace card to help them: unpredictability. The alien races are backward-looking, depending on a database, The Library, for the answers to their problems. Brin's humans – and hopefully your players – are erratic and creative.

Alien Races

The idea of uplifted animals isn't new, even among roleplaying games. *Traveller* – which precedes the Uplift trilogy by several years – has uplifted dogs, vargr, as one of its major races.

Where Brin succeeds is by extrapolating the behaviour of the original animal into the behaviour of the sentient being. He doesn't give us coldly rational beings in funny costumes or simple pseudo-humans. His dolphins are still playful and wise-cracking. They speak in a form of whistling haiku called Trinary (or Primal for the primitive form).

They make expert pilots, because they're used to navigating in three dimensions rather than two. They're good at language, but don't make great tool users, which they can only use via a kind of cybernetic nerve socket. When someone's in danger and they panic, they get 'rescue fever' and will do everything they can to help the victim, even at a cost of their own life or safety. In short, they act just like you think intelligent dolphins would act.

Brin's chimpanzees are equally well realised. They're good humoured, disrespectful, and have something of an inferiority complex around humans. They like percussive music. They still do atavistic dances (in secret) when there's thunder. *Planet of the Apes* has nothing on these chimps, Roddy McDowell's funny walk notwithstanding.

Most of Brin's aliens are shadowy, background figures. In *Sundiver*, the most prominent alien, Culla, is basically a plot device. Things change in the last of the trilogy, *The Uplift War*, where Brin goes into great detail on his avian Gubru. They have ritualistic displays, a strongly hierarchical pecking order, and a rather weird mating ritual in which sex and politics are one and the same. They also smell like chicken to the not-very-self-controlled chimpanzees.

MAN'S EVOLUTION

"One side insisted that man should be proud of his unique heritage as a self-evolved race, having won intelligence from Nature herself on the savannah and shoreline of East Africa. The other side held that homo sapiens – just as every other known race of sophonts – was part of a chain of cultural and genetic uplifting that stretched back to the fabled early days of the galaxy, the time of the Progenitors."

Sundiver, page 46

The Science

Some roleplayers and readers really care how things such as a 'hyperdrive' might work; I'm happy to say I'm not one of them. Nevertheless, you have to be able to suspend your disbelief in someone else's vision of future technology. Brin doesn't deluge you with jargon, but there's enough hard science there to keep anyone who isn't a Physics graduate guessing. Maybe Brin's sunship – a perfectly mirrored sphere with a refrigeration unit inside and an X-ray laser to discharge excess heat – really would work. The technology certainly seems a lot more feasible than the SS Enterprise and its matter transporters.

It's worth making the point that, although the technology of the sunship is milked a bit (this was his first book), Brin doesn't let the technology get in the way of the story. It's just there, like the furniture. Which is as it should be.

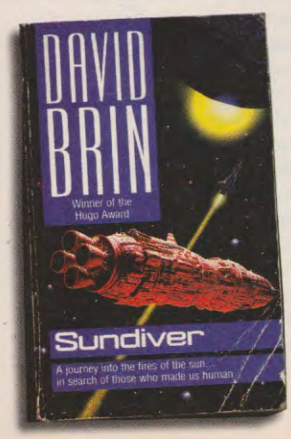
If you're running any kind of space-faring roleplaying game, read these books. *Sundiver* won the Hugo Award, and *Startide Rising* the Hugo and Nebula Awards for good reason.

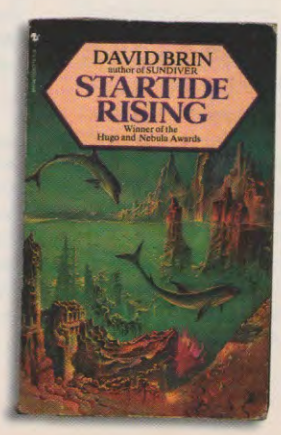
essential David Brinn

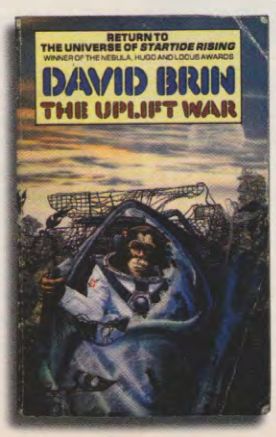
Sundiver (Bantam, 1985, ISBN 10 553 17162 3)
Earth is launching manned spacecraft into the sun in search of the patrons that gave humanity sentience. But not all of the magnetic life-forms there seem friendly. A troubleshooter discovers the truth. Basically, a scientific detective story.

Startide Rising (Bantam, 1985, ISBN 0 553 17170 4)
The first spaceship with a (mostly) sentient dolphin crew discovers a secret that the universe's hostile aliens all want. It goes into hiding on an uncharted water world. A space battle rages above the planet, while on the ship the more atavistic dolphins decide to mutiny.

The Uplift War (Bantam, 1987, ISBN 0 553 17452 5)
In an effort to prise the dolphins' discovery (in *Startide Rising*) from the Terrans, a hostile avian race invades its least-protected colony world. A handful of humans and some sentient chimps fight a resistance war. *War of the Worlds* meets *Gorillas in the Mist.*







arcane scribblings

They say the pen is mightier than the sword. They lie. But it is far more civilized this way.

Dear arcane,
You've done it again! You've once more claimed to be a systemless magazine. In your reply to Derek Johnston (**arcane** 16), you said (and I quote) "**arcane** is never going to tie itself to two or three systems..." Was I merely imagining the fact that you are giving away a free *Magic* book with issue 17?

I know this accusation has been levelled at you before. You replied that *Magic* was the most popular CCG, so you were justified in wittering on about it. If this is your idea, why don't you support *AD&D* or *CoC* more fully?

If you're going to continue on this course, you'd better rename yourselves 'the roleplaying (and *M:TG)* magazine'.

Tim Gilbert, Northants

No, you weren't imagining the free Magic *book. It was real – real paper and everything.*

I was talking about roleplaying systems in **arcane** *16. But I suppose you're right. I am, indeed, a rotten stinking liar.*

Trouble is, 'the roleplaying (and M:TG*) magazine' is an awful title.*

Dear arcane,
It was interesting to read your article about introducing love into roleplaying campaigns in **arcane** 16. Anything to encourage players to think about their characters in terms beyond advancement through combat and action-adventure has to be a good thing. But I was astounded that the piece failed to even mention *Pendragon* in this context – the one system where this sort of thing is written into gameplay. Courtly romance and the chivalrous wooing of ladies is as much a part of being an Arthurian knight as parading at the joust and smiting Saxons.

For a definitive statement on how to work love themes into a campaign, refer to *The Adventure of the Heart Blade* in the *Blood and Lust* supplement. Players who prefer something more character-intimate and less epic could do worse than read the Forest Primeval setting for White Wolf's *Changeling* printed in the *Hidden Glens* book – a bizarre but moving love triangle between faerie, wraith and mortal.

Paul Clammer, Bath

Er, yeah, but Next Time we do an article on love and romance we'll mention Pendragon. *Definitely.*

Dear arcane,
Tamsyn Hutchinson asks (**arcane** 16), not unreasonably: "Why is it that when a long standing group of guys hear that a woman will be joining their group, they are sometimes put out?"

I think people believe what society tells them to; girls shouldn't be interested in roleplaying, just as they shouldn't like SF, comics or computer games; they should be in the kitchen.

You'd have thought that nobody believed this rubbish any more. My hope is that the majority of roleplayers are intelligent and mature enough to see through these stereotypes. The problem lies in the patriarchal system that exists in real life. Roleplaying, as a microcosm of life, reflects that. Society tells us we're inadequate if we roleplay. It says we're nerds. We ignore that and play anyway. So, if we can be brave enough to form our own opinions on this, then why not on the subject of female roleplayers?

Stuart Moses, Croydon

We can. I suppose to some, Game Night is still a male preserve, kind of like watching the World Cup Final with your mates, or – assuming you're an old man – going to a Working Man's Club for a pint of mild and a game of dominoes. It's just chauvinism though, isn't it?

Dear arcane,
I was most disappointed with the review of *Battle Rage* (**arcane** 16). The game was criticised for not being a mass combat game, which it never claimed to be, and for being a skirmish game, which it is meant to be, and which it does very successfully, in my opinion.

Your reviews are generally very good (a major reason why I buy **arcane**), but my friends and I were dismayed by the sweepingly crass statements of this particular one. *Battle Rage* is fast, hectic, affordable, fun, versatile and full of colour – a mixture of roleplay and warfare, nicely filling a niche in the market. I instantly loved it. I was shouting and hollering in my first game.

Ben Ferguson, Brighton

Mark Donald's review does explicitly state, on two occasions, that this is a skirmish game. But he still didn't think that it cut the mustard. Opinions – and of course all reviews are subjective – will always differ.

If you're burning to see your own opinions in print, the good news is that we are always looking for new writers. If you're interested, send your name and address, along with an example game review of not more than 500 words to: Andy Butcher, arcane, *30 Monmouth St, Bath, BA1 2BW.*

Dear arcane,
Whereas I did agree with some of the points in your *Settlers of Catan* review, I find it difficult to believe it's the best game ever. I would be interested to know what other board games you have played.

Over the last few years, the Germans have published many fine games of which *Settlers* is one, but it is by no means the best. Most of these games have been available in the UK for years. *Sumo* reviews them and places like Just Games, Esdevium and Leisure Games stock them. *Settlers* is a great game but there's a lot of competition and it seems an odd choice to give 10/10 to.

Tony something illegible, Kent

We-ell, Siedler *was the Essen Game Fair game of the year for 1995, so it's not exactly like we're in a minority of one. Unlike some.*

Dear arcane,
The fact that Brother Litnik (Encounters, **arcane** 16) cannot read, would not stop him from helping Sister Sisal copy religious manuscripts and other documents. In fact, it might well be an advantage, because he would not know if he was copying divine works or some important trade/political treaty. His illiteracy would mean that he could not run off to an opposing power and inform them of any details.

Mark Ratcliffe, Godalming

His copying wouldn't be very good, though, would it? I've never got an illiterate adult to try this, but utterly inconclusive tests on my three year-old son suggest that his efforts would be legible, but only barely.

Dear arcane,
Has Jo Walton ever been inside a casino or is Encounter 15 part of a strange dream? Having worked in casinos for nine years, seeing flaws not only in the game descriptions themselves but also in the workings of a casino, I cannot help but cast down my Blackjack shoe, jump upon my table and shout "No!"

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with arcane *there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter clearly marked 'arcane scribblings' and addressed to* arcane, *30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. The slightly more technically advanced among you can send us a fax on (01225) 732252, while all you fully-fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at:* arcane@futurenet.co.uk *or visit our Web site at:* http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html. *We look forward to hearing from you.*

Funny ha-ha?

Letter Of The MONTH

Dear arcane,

I'm writing about Tamsyn Hutchinson's allegation (**arcane** 16) that men are incapable of injecting humour into their roleplaying. This is simply not true. Of course men have a sense of humour, if this is properly regulated within a sensible set of guidelines laid down either by the company producing the game in question or, if this is not possible, by the referee. Unfortunately, many a system does not actually include any proviso for merriment – one of the major culprits being Ms Hutchinson's own favourite *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. Luckily, however, my own group tends towards innovation and has developed the following simple system for incorporating humour into roleplaying.

Firstly, only characters whose Nature or Demeanour is that of Jester can joke at all. Curmudgeons should lose experience for any attempts at wit. Secondly, the following words are simply not funny and should not be used in a humorous manner at any time: banana, fallacy, weapon, and enormous willy. Thirdly, to generate the type of joke to be used, careful attention must be paid to circumstances, atmosphere, mood and the following table: D6 roll – 1: pun, 2: sarcastic remark, 3: *double entendre*, 4: shaggy dog story, 5: slapstick comedy routine, 6: ref's choice/roll again. Finally, the effect of the joke should be calculated according to the following formula:

$$\sqrt{-4}\ \frac{\text{(group's Charisma x n° of words in joke)}}{\text{(n° of dice on table + n° of women present)}}$$

If the result is greater than ten, the joke is clearly funny and laughter *not lasting more than 15 seconds* should ensue. If the result is less than ten, the joke is obviously not funny, and possibly even offensive. I hope Ms Hutchinson finds this rule system useful in her games with humourless males, and that it allows her to enjoy many a jovial session.

Brian Gillatt, Glasgow

Inspired! If only Greg Costikyan had thought of this when he was designing Toon, *you'd never get into those awkward situations where you're gnawing the table with fear because Jimmy the Beagle has just discovered he's running on air while everyone else is – damn their eyes – laughing!*

No business whose profit relies on pandering to people's greed would do something so blatant as 'take a cut'. The profits made by casinos depend upon allowing punters to think they're always one step away from that elusive winning streak. If the casino took a cut the punters would be reminded that the house is the only winner in the long run.

Referees should bear this point in mind and also ensure that security in the casino is always tight. This goes for the staff as much as anyone else. Croupiers and pit staff found fraternising with customers will invariably be severely disciplined, maybe even dismissed, and the customer's membership would be immediately revoked.

Apart from that, **arcane** 15 was as good as ever and highly enjoyable. Keep up the good work and could I possibly have a T-shirt, please?

Lee Myles, Stoke

There's no escape when you're refereeing or designing a scenario is there? You can't be an expert on everything. There's always a Chemistry graduate who will try to spend all his character's money on, say, custard powder and fertiliser, and proceed to derail the plot by blowing up the city...

You're right about casinos, but if the players don't notice it doesn't matter. Refereeing is all illusion.

Dear arcane,

Mr A Townsend was right (**arcane** 17) in saying that it's extremely difficult to join an existing RPG group. If you're having fun with your friends, it's a rather daunting prospect to let some stranger join in. They may have anti-social habits, be a psychopath, or simply prefer *role*playing to dice-rolling, or vice versa.

As for your local games store, many do have games areas, or games evenings. However, in smaller stores at least, these seem invariably occupied with CCG players or wargamers.

Do keep trying though, Mr Townsend. Find the right group and you'll have an experience full of wonder, delight and a whole lot of fun, too.

Derek Johnston, Welwyn Garden City

Dear arcane,

The article on Celts was good, but I was surprised to find Bernard Cornwell's *Warlord Chronicles* missing from the suggested reading list. The books *The Winter King* and *Enemy of God* provide not just an exceedingly good and readable account of Celtic/post-Romanic, Christian religion, they also give an innovative take on the Arthurian mythos.

I'd urge anyone wanting to run a Celtic campaign to read these novels – and if there are any *Pendragon* referees jaded with the romantic Arthurian cycle, then these books might be the antidote you're looking for.

By the way, **arcane** gets better in terms of quality and content each month. Keep it up!

Lawrence Whitaker, by e-mail

Dear arcane,

Just a quick letter in support of Andrew Rilstone. Films like *Red Dawn*, *The Blob* and *Aliens* use normal people thrust into insane situations. I hope Andrew has injected new ideas into people who were content to run games with characters who are heroes from the start. If you want adventure, play a shop worker being chased by demons. Sound boring? I suggest you watch the *Evil Dead* trilogy.

Matthew Tucker, Lanarkshire

Most of the characters in Aliens *– all but three, in fact (Ripley, Newt and that slimy double-crossing guy in the suit) are trained killers. Your point holds, though.*

Dear arcane,

Well done for hiding your mag from me for 11 months! Looking back at all the issues I actually picked up on #12, which I think was the dodgiest cover (followed shortly by #13). Since then they seem to have improved.

Concerning the letter regarding the size of your magazine. I always get the same feeling that it is lightweight. It has plenty of good articles and reviews etc. However, I don't think that all of the articles have enough meat on them.

We don't need endless reams of stats etc. The article on communications was very good, but did not really cover what communications really *are* available in a fantasy campaign. There were a few comments in one of the side pieces which could have been greatly expanded. Spells of scrying, crystal balls, message spells and the like are all very useful, but ingenious ways of using them were not discussed. This sort of stuff would be an improvement. How about communication in sci-fi games like *Traveller?*

I also think that more advertising would be acceptable – more shops for example – because these are often good ways for gamers to get to stuff. Worcester, for example, has a GW shop and another games shop selling TSR stuff.

Please can we have something on miniatures? Even if it's only bi-monthly!

Despite all of the above I think you're doing a good job. Hopefully more people will read your mag now it is more established. Many gamers I know haven't bought it yet because they have had years of buying issues 1, 2 and 3 of a mag and then seen it fold. If you're lucky I'll subscribe next month.

Giles the Zog

Do it. Do it now. Turn to page 18. Pick up the phone...

arcane shorts

Many of your letters are very long. In fact, most of them are. We have to edit some. Severely.

Re. British Army/GW issue weapons. Okay, it's too expensive. They'd have to re-release updated kit every year and the swords will never fit the scabbards.

Pete, Kidderminster

I was just about to go back to buying *Dragon* when KJC Games sent me an advert for **arcane**. I just had to buy a copy. I would give it 10/10 but I think the magazine could be twice its size. How about adding battle reports on each game out there? I would love to know what everyone else is up to.

Steven Fox, Cambs

Battle reports are probably more suited to PBM publications than to **arcane**. *The PBM column is missing from this issue but this does not mean the end of our coverage. I'm looking for interesting articles to run on the subject. Help me.*

Recently, a female friend of mine joined our roleplaying group. She was worried that she might disrupt our 'macho bonding', but actually she rejuvenated a group that was becoming rather boring. It was just like Kochanski's appearance in *Red Dwarf*.

Stuart Moses, Croydon

But it was funnier before.

Excellent Celts article from Jo Walton. Any chance of other articles like this? Maybe on the Incas, the Medieval Chinese, or the Norse?

Derek Johnston, Welwyn

Yes. This issue.

Just a few words from France. **arcane** is a Very Good Mag. But why don't you write more about *Mutant Chronicles* and *Whispering Vault?*

Pat, France

Fancy writing anything?

How about some binders to keep our issues of **arcane** in?

Someone or other

Soon. We've been going long enough, after all.

free reader ads

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● Look! Rare and uncommon cards. *Magic, Jyhad, Trek, Mythos, Spellfire, Hyborian,* others. Limited stocks. Quote needs. Rob Thomas, 67 Wheal Rose, Porthleven, Helston, Cornwall TR13 9BE

● *Star Wars, Star Trek, X-Files* and *BattleTech* CCG cards for swap and for sale. Pat Eadie, 37 Whiteacres Close, Gosport, Hants PO12 4XD

● *X-Files, Vampire, Mythos, Dark Age* CCGs. Will swap, sell, buy. 54 Bolingbroke St, Newcastle NE6 5PH. 0191 240 1811

● *X-Files* CCG and trading cards for sale or trade. Contact Mike, 71 Mill Lane, Skellow, Doncaster DN6 8PE

● Ten *ST:TNG* rares. Including Q, Riker, Wesley – £35 ono. Ring Ben 01788 510646 4pm+ weekdays, anytime weekends.

● *Magic* sets – *Revised, Dark Chronicles, Fallen Empires, Homelands.* Also large number of singles. Steve 0131 624 0080

● 187 *Rage* cards for sale, gc, including one starter set. Offers? Alex 01743 791801

● Complete set of *Jyhad* incl. all misprints. Vgc. Offers please. Phone Dale on 01463 222924

● *M:TG,* complete sets (all NM). *Revised* £220, *Dark Sun* £120, *Fallen Empires* £50, *Chronicles* £50

Unfortunately, this reader didn't leave a name or number. A crucial flaw in their marketing strategy, we fear.

● Complete *X-Files 1/2/3* (£350), *Star Wars Finest* (£150), incl. all chase cards, binders. German USA94 squad (£25): 0113 271 3532

wanted

● Any *Babylon 5* or *X-Files* trading cards? Rare swaps, including Parallels and Foils. Also, any *Ultimate Combat* Gold Belt rares to complete my set? Willing to swap/pay. Pat Eadie, 37 Whiteacres Close, Gosport, Hants PO12 4XD

● Does anybody out there have *X-Files* CCG cards to trade? Send a list of what you want and have, or ring. Anthony Read, 36 Roman Road, Stoke, Coventry CV2 4LD. 01203 458848. E-mail AREAD@coventry.ac.uk

● *M:TG* cards Jokulhaups, Deflection, Balduvian Hydra, Crimson Hellkite, Vodalian Knights. Will swap or buy. Nicholas Richardson 01903 505251

● Widescreen chromium collector's cards – *Star Wars* (C1-C10), *Empire* (C1, C3, C4, C5, C8). Call Lee on 0113 271 3532 after 6pm

● *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* sourcebooks wanted. Must be good condition. Please send list and price wanted. Seeker Kzin, 3 Beaufort Close, Saint George, Bristol BS5 8DJ

● *Shadowrun* supplement *Riggers Black Book* + adventures *Harlequin, Queen Euphoria* and *Universal Brotherhood.* Martyn 01530 837982

● *Monsters! Monsters!* by Flying Buffalo. *Dragon Dice* Highland (tower), Black (Drake), Yellow (Wyrm) and Coral, Dwarf, Goblin and Lava Monsters. Kevin 0114 268 3402

● *Black Book 1st edition, Traveller* books and supplements wanted. Any condition. Steve 01302 710574 after 9pm

● Amiga games: *Stunt Car Racer, Kick Off, Player Manager, Golden Axe.* Buy/swap. Call Lee 0113 271 3532 after 6pm

● Old hardback *Warhammer* armies. The good one with allies, mercenaries and all armies. Mark Armagh 01861 525516

● *Call of Cthulhu 5th ed.* hardback, vgc. Also *White Dwarf* No 99. Call Kelvin after 5pm weekdays. 01825 768157

● Waddington's *Game of Dracula. Jyhad, V:TES* swaps, letters, pen pals, thaumaturgy. Anything. Spider, 33 Dumble Close, Corby NN18 8LV

contacts

● Experienced gamer seeks Aberdeen group. Interests – *Vampire: TM, Mind's Eye Masquerade, Shadowrun.* Call Andrew after 6.30pm. 01224 481327

● Experienced roleplayer wanted. Must be 18+ and interested in cyberpunk and sci-fi genre. NI Clubb, 254 Baldwins Lane, Croxley Green, Herts WD3 3LQ. Or phone 01923 778379

● Experienced gamer looking for group to join in Chesham and surrounding area. Will play most things. Laurence Fleming, 14a Old Sax Lane, Chartridge, Chesham, Bucks HP5 2TB. 01494 778300

● Absolute beginner desperate! – for roleplaying experience of any sort. 16 Pound House, Godfrey Walk, Ashford TN23 1XH. Sly!

● Malcolm Campbell wrote an excellent article in *The Last Province* issue 5. I want to ask him a couple of questions about it. He can contact me at Steven.Ward@Brunel.ac.uk

● *Magic* player fairly new to game seeks others in Midlands. Neil 01384 836343

● Lost Swedish RPG/LRPG fanatic wants group or club to join. Prefer White Wolf. Call now! Andreas Brömster 0181 830 3667

Lost? You're a thousand miles out, mate!

● Wanted! To hear from groups in the South Yorkshire area. Phone Brad 01302 327551

● Roleplayer (24) seeks group in Potteries area. *Shadowrun* or *WoD* games preferred. Call after 6pm. Becka 01782 633141

live action

Most of our LARPies have been very quiet this month, which is unusual.

● Fantasy LRP system seeks players for weekend event in Essex. 11-14th April. Contact Matt 0113 295 5302 before 21st March, 01279 652840 afterwards

● New players wanted for Fantasy LRP campaign starting August. All welcome. Free players' guide and info pack. Time Games, flat

Please place my free ad under the following heading

- ☐ Games for sale
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- ☐ Live action
- ☐ Play-By-Mail
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1, 4 Rectory Place, 93 Portsmouth Road, Guildford GU2 5DG. 01483 562318

Play-By-Mail

● *The Nithingwood* PBM – adventure and magic in ancient forests. £5 for start-up pack, turns £2.50. Rob Lane, 161 Clipstone Road West, Forest Town, Mansfield, Notts NG19 0BT. 01623 635853

● Play quest game 13? Want to join an alliance? Contact 'Death Stormers Legion'. Steven Fox, 18 Allen Road, Ramsey, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 1JU

fanzines

● *Monomyth* issue four + archives. Fiction magazine. 65p+p&p/issue. Send cheque/PO to R Burman, 99 Sandringham Road, S-O-S, Essex SS1 2UG

● *Warpstone* – the *WFRP* fanzine. Issue four out now. £2.50. John Keane, 75 Headstone Road, Harrow HA1 1PQ. 0181 933 2437

miniatures

● Very large collection of lead *Dungeons & Dragons* figures for sale, some superbly painted. Contact after 6pm, 01733 270479

USS Bozeman

Flying down the very throat of adversity and against all reasonable probability, the USS Bozeman soldiers on in its desperate mission to rid the universe of evil snotlingspawn...

● "Bateson to security. Find the snotling. Kill it if you have to. Enterprise. Help us now!"

Security have been eaten by multiple proto-snotlings, Captain Bateson, sir. Suggest we abandon ship, sir. No time to delay, sir.

● ISS Eris to Imperial Legate Melnibon. Empiricist doctrines cannot be allowed to dominate free space. Capt. Sherbert Hues.

You've got a point there, Hues. But what is it?

● ISS Eris Internal Comms. Power the stones. Unchain spear and focus on Melnibon. Release.

The stones? Are you sure? Their power could...

● "This is the Loyal Imperial BatRon 153, out of Corridor Sector. You are in violation of the Imperial Rules of War. Surrender in the name of the Emperor Lucan, or face elimination."

Prime Meson Weapons? Prepare Virus? Engage Black Globes at 30%? That's fighting talk.

● "Ultraboom Implosion Missile 256. All missile groups select different targets. My group target USS Bozeman. Targeting, steady, steady. RAMMING SPEED! Let's show these bastards how big Ultraboom is..."

It doesn't matter how big it is, Mr Scattergun, it's what you do with it that counts. And you missed. Again. By some considerable way.

other stuff

● A500/A600/A1200 games (£5-£10 each). CD32 with 14 games (£90). Omega 33MHz, 0meg RAMboard (£20). 1970 World Cup sticker album (£50). 1997 calendars *X-Files* (£5), Oasis (£8), *Star Wars* (£12), *X-File* videos (£25 all 4). *X-Files* map (A4). 34 framed colour 10x8s superstar autographs, Schwarzenegger, Eastwood, Van Damme, Pammi – £80-£100 each. Lee 0113 271 3532

● *Interzone* mags for sale, 1-6, 8-34, 37-39. Mint condition. Offers? Adrian 01455 615843

● *WD* 36-92, *Imagine* 1-30, *Tortured Souls* 1-12. Lots more. Offers? Colin 01529 414792

roleplaying clubs and societies

Tell us about your club – where, when and what you play – and we'll tell the world.

● **Bath Roleplaying Club**, Sundays, 11.30-5pm. No fees. Needs new players (18+).
Neal 01225 463631

● **Battlezone**, Fridays, 5pm, 58 Boutport Street, Barnstaple, Devon.
Pete Ashman 01271 321344

● **Black Country Roleplaying Society**, Thursdays, 7.30pm. Blackheath Coronation Social Club, Park Street, Rowley Regis, West Midlands. All ages and games – 70p a night.
Steve Turner 01384 235244

● Formerly **Bournemouth Beserkers**, Fridays, 7-9pm, 32 Ellingham Avenue, March, Cambs. "Got *Planescape* for Christmas and need keen players."
Chris or Debbie 01354 657713

● **Bradford Games Club**, Sundays, 11.30am-6.30pm, Gingerbread Centre, Darley Street, Bradford Centre. "All Workshop games, some others. £1 for room rent."

● **Brighton**. Any system. Playing *D&D* at the moment. And *Conspiracy X*.
Ric 01273 683400

● **Bristol LRP Society**. Monthly fantasy LRPs out and indoors, rich gameworld, comprehensive rules. Also *Renewal, Gathering* etc. Meet Friday 8pm at the back room of the Assize Courts pub, Bristol. Old timers and virgins welcome.
Ciaran 0117 974 1863
Andy 0117 970 6651
Dave the Hobbit 0117 907 9195

● **Bromsgrove Roleplayers**. Wednesdays 7-10pm. The Burcot Room, The Council House, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove.
Pete 01905 354717
Dave 01527 875789

● **Croxley Roleplayers**, meet most Sundays at my home. Play cyberpunk and sci-fi genres mostly.
Mr NI Clubb 01923 778379

● **Dragons on the Hill**. Wednesday 6-11pm. (18+) King of Diamonds, Leather Lane, EC1.
Mark Shorey 0181 560 3160

● **East Kilbride Games Club**, "Speak fish man!"
John 01355 260601

● **East Midlands RPGA/Harlequins Games Club**, Sundays, 1.45-6pm. 2nd Arnold (St Mary's) Scout HQ, Atherley House, Calverton Road, Arnold, Nottingham.
Simon Stoppard 0115 921 5533
John Harris 0115 939 4185
sara@theleys.demon.co.uk

● **Elemental Lords**, every three weeks, Worcester.
Paul Baker 01905 428386
d.foxall-reilly@worc.ac.uk

● **Finchley Games Club**, Thursdays, 6.30-10.30pm. Old Finchleians Sports Club, Woodside Park.
Seren 0181 202 3856

● **Glasgow University Gaming Society**, Thursdays (term time only), 5.30-9pm. Queen Margaret Union, University Gardens.

● **Grimsby Wargamers Club** for all wargames, boardgames and cardgames (no FRPs). 14+ only, Mondays and Thursdays.
Tim Walker 01472 348953

● **Guild of Mêlée and Magic**, Various days, Various venues. First visit free if you take along a copy of **arcane**, annual membership £5.
Central (Mondays RPGs, Tuesdays CCGs)
– Jason 0181 715 8675, The George, 213 Strand WC2
West (Saturdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Gerald 0181 991 1297*
East (Thursdays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Mel 0181 595 3467*
South (Sundays – RPGs/CCGs) – *Jon 0181 699 9654*

● **Islington**, weekends. *M:TG*, roleplaying, GW board games.
Simon 0171 226 7724

● **Liverpool WGA**, Thursdays, 5.30-9pm, Sat and Sun 2-7pm, 43 Renshaw Street, Liverpool. "All ages welcome. RPGs also."
Jim 0151 428 1076

● **Manticore Games Club**, Thursday, 7.30pm. Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead. Cards, boardgames, RPGs.
Steve 0181 903 5446

● **Minotaur's Head Roleplay Society**, North London. RPGs, CCGs, wargames, freeform.
Steve 0181 482 5568

● **Omega**, 2nd and 4th Sundays, 10-5pm. 18+. Seeking experienced roleplayers.
Paul 0161 344 1066
knight.errant@dial.pipex.com
http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/plaza/ran54/omega.htm

● **Pembrokeshire Games Club**, Wednesday, 6-9pm. Community Education Centre, Haverfordwest. *Magic, AD&D, Vampire, Necromunda.*
Adam 01437 762633

● **Redcar Adventurers Roleplaying Games Club**, Friday, 6-9pm. Redcar Library.
John 01287 642523

● **Ring of Mages**, *M:TG* club.
Jamie 01888 544880

● **Roleplayers of Chester**, Wednesdays, 7.30pm-late. Chester Rail Club, Hoole.
Greg 01606 883698
Allison 0151 200 6945

● **Rugby Players' Guild**, Monday, 7.30-11pm. Players and GMs (18+) welcome.
Bill 01788 334165
Keary 01788 334941

● **SASRA RP&WGC**, Thursdays, 7.30pm, Summergrove Hotel, Hensingham. "Wide range of RPGs, LRPs and CCGs."
John 01946 590114
Ray 01946 861204

● **Spartan Circle Club**, Sunday, 6.30-10.30pm. St Laurence's Centre, Northfield, Birmingham.
Paul Rickards 0121 415 4722

● **Stamford Adventure Society**, Monday and Wednesday 8pm-11pm, RAF association, St Pauls Street, Stamford, Lincs. Roleplay and wargames. Players and GMs 16+.

● **Stockport Goblin Horde RP Club**, Wednesdays, 7pm. *AD&D, WFRP, Shadowrun* etc.
Rachel 0161 456 1444

● **The Albion Guard Games Club**, Mondays and Tuesdays. The Plough, Dog's Head Street, Ipswich.
Keith 01473 289560

● **The Orc's Armpit**, Second Wednesday every month. Hobson's Choice, Banbury. *Magic, Trek* CCGs. *Earthdawn, Warhammer* RPGs.

● **Wandsworth RPG**, Mondays, 7.30pm. 57a Heathfield Road, Wandsworth.
Dave 0171 738 1807

● **West London Card Games**, Wednesdays. The Castle, Acton. *Magic, Star Wars* etc.
John 0171 573 1753 (days)
0181 993 4439 (evenings)

● **Windsor RPG Club**, Tuesdays, 7.30-11pm, The Three Elms, junction of Clarence Road and Hatch Lane, Windsor. Over 18s only. We play anything. Games rotate on 6-8 week cycle.
Andy 01753 573394 (evenings)

● **Worlds Apart Roleplayers**, Tuesdays 6.30-11pm, Wartling Road Hall, Eastbourne.
Geoff 01323 646907

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A TALE FROM GNOME WORLD PART FOUR
WRITERS: DAN ABNETT AND ANDY LANNING. ARTIST: ANDREW CURRIE
"IT'LL BUY OUR TRUSTY LOCKSMITH MORE TIME."
DON'T ANSWER... MAKE THEM SWEAT.
"THEN DEA WITH IT!"
"BUT NAZ! LOOK! THE SWAT BOYS ARE SENDING IN A SIEGE ENGINE!"
OKAY, LEGOBRIK. GET READY TO CHUCK THE KEG ONCE I'VE LIT THE FUSE.
"YES! AND THE HEAD MAGE IS TOAST!"
WHOOOOMMMFF!
LOOK OUT, LEGGY! IT'S THE BLINKING HOBBIT!
GET THAT FLAME AWAY FROM THE POWDERKEGS, YOU -UGHH!
THAPOOOW!
YIPPEE KI AY DRAGON DESPOILER!
ELF RISK!

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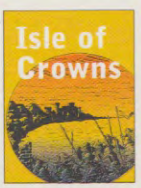

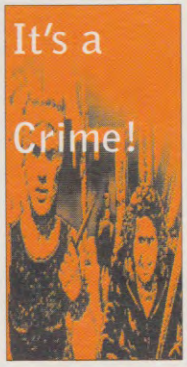

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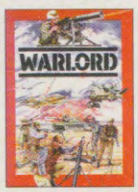

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